FIVE LECTURES
ON
SHAKESPEARE

BY
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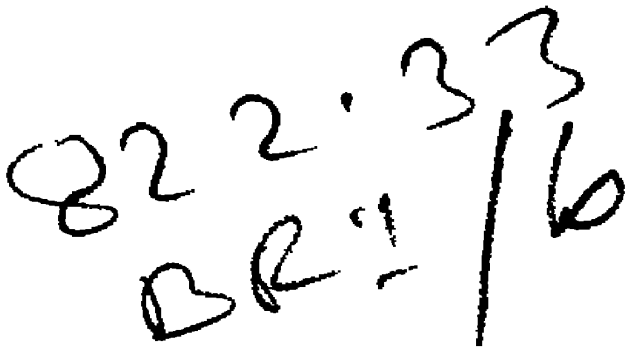
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JULIA FRANKLIN



LONDON
GEORGE BELL AND SONS
1895

FIRST LECTURE

THE POET AND THE MAN



FIVE LECTURES ON SHAKESPEARE.

THE POET AND THE MAN.

My intention to speak of Shakespeare in a series of five lectures, to an audience until now unfamiliar to me, is so bold a one that now, when I am about to put it into execution, it really astonishes me. Everyone who has given more than a superficial study to the mighty poet will be able to sympathize with me in this feeling. The greatness of the subject, the wealth of material, the multitude of problems arising, and the innumerable variety of attempts to solve them—how can I dare hope to do justice to all this, to master such wealth and variety, at least to so master them in five short

hours that you may receive an approximate idea of my conception of the subject? Greatly do I need your forbearance and that sympathetic response, that fine and subtle accord, which, perhaps, I could expect from a promiscuous audience only in the city of Goethe.

My plan in these lectures is to touch, in their order, upon the important problems to which the phenomenon of Shakespeare gives rise. We will attempt to force our way right into the heart of the subject—the development of the poet, and the many sides which his developed thought, will, and power open to our observation.

First in order we have to discuss a question which has now for a number of years been a burning one: "the relation between the poet and the man," or, as we might also formulate the question, the possibility of the identity of the poet and the man Shakespeare.

It is not merely since yesterday that a

Shakespeare myth has been spoken of; but whoever uses this expression to-day has an entirely different thing in his mind from what was meant by it thirty or forty years ago. When that worthy German Shakespeare scholar, my honoured teacher, Nicolas Delius, issued a publication in 1851 under the title "The Myth of Shakespeare," the thought of ventilating the problem which shall engage us to-day was far from his mind. His object was simply to examine the mass of reports and stories which had found their way into the traditional biographies of Shakespeare, with regard to the testimony brought to bear upon them and their inner worth; to separate the true from the false, the established from the doubtful, in order to obtain a reliable, if meagre, sketch of Shakespeare's life.

Such was the case then. And how is it to-day? Were Delius in a position to publish his work anew, he would perhaps begin it with a chapter entitled: "Shakes-

peare no Myth." You are no doubt well aware that at present not one, but a great number of authors, chiefly in England and America, maintain that the great poet whom we study and revere falsely bears the name of Shakespeare—that Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Lear, and the other creations that bear the stamp of this unique genius, and have been handed down to us as Shakespeare's work, are the creations of an entirely different being from the William Shakespeare of whom the parish register and other documents tell us. The Shakespeare who was born in the year 1564 in Stratford-on-Avon, married there at an early age and begot children; who afterward went to London and made a success as actor and theatrical manager, and who died in his native place in the year 1616—that personality, sufficiently authenticated historically, cannot be regarded as the creator of those glorious dramas which form the delight of both the learned and unlearned. He

may, at most, have somewhat rearranged these plays for the stage, but he gave his name only to conceal their true author.

The view of which I speak is not an entirely new one. Karl Müller-Mylius reports that as early as 1843 the well-known Catholic historian Professor Gförrer, then librarian in Stuttgart, privately expressed the opinion that it was impossible that the historical Shakespeare should have composed the Shakespeare dramas. In the fifties there arose nearly simultaneously in America and England the notion that the famous statesman and philosopher Lord Bacon, Shakespeare's contemporary, was the real author of these plays. The publications of Miss Delia Bacon and of Judge Nathaniel Holmes in America, as well as those of the Englishman William Henry Smith, then began to represent and defend this view in wider circles. But it was still possible to dismiss the whole affair as a mere freak not worthy of serious refutation.

At the present day the matter stands somewhat differently. The number of followers of this strange view has of late increased very considerably; the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy has developed a whole literature, which at the beginning of the year 1882 counted 255 books and dissertations (of which 161 belong to America, and 69 to England), and can now no longer be so easily overlooked. But, beyond this, the American-English theory has by this time found advocates even in Germany. We are not at liberty, therefore, simply to ignore it, but must attempt briefly to explain our position in regard to it.

The theory is made up of two elements: Shakespeare's right to the works which bear his name is contested; the authorship of those works is attributed to Lord Bacon. He who maintains the first of these propositions is not by any means bound to uphold the second; and there are those who content themselves for the

present with the simple negation, leaving open the question of the real authorship of the Shakespeare productions. Among these there are some who entertain the idea of a multiplicity of authors, and are disposed to consider the Shakespeare question as analogous to the Homeric one. By far the most important and the fundamental question, the solution of which might render the investigation of the other superfluous, is evidently that which can be condensed into the words: Shakespeare or not Shakespeare? Therefore we shall consider that first and foremost.

When we maintain that the historical William Shakespeare is the author of the works which bear his name, we do so in accordance with a tradition of nearly three hundred years—a tradition based upon a wealth of authentic contemporary testimony such as but few facts in early literary history can produce. The new Shakespeare mythologists find, of course,

an easy means of disposing of this testimony. The contemporaries of the poet, they say, concerned themselves but little about the authorship of the plays. They could, therefore, easily fall prey to a deception in which a number of them were accomplices. As to the motives of that deception, opinions are greatly divided. Enough that in Shakespeare's time a grand conspiracy was organized with the object of bringing him forward as the writer of a series of masterpieces which originated from an entirely different author or authors. The most remarkable thing is that no one should have been found, either at that time or after Shakespeare's death, to let out the secret, notwithstanding the numerous anecdotes otherwise connected with the personality of William Shakespeare. On the contrary, not a particle of evidence can be produced, either from Shakespeare's time or that succeeding, to sustain the opinion that Shakespeare did not write these

works. You see that it is impossible to argue this matter seriously, and we will, therefore, just briefly touch upon the second element of the theory, the supposition of Bacon's authorship. And here I must say plainly: he who thinks it 'even conceivable that Bacon could have written the works which appear under Shakespeare's name can know neither Bacon nor Shakespeare. One who has a thorough knowledge of Shakespeare needs but a slight acquaintance with Bacon to become convinced that in Shakespeare is manifest a different spirit, a different heart, a different character. And the student of Bacon need but read a page of Shakespeare to reach the conclusion that the statesman-philosopher, though his life had been at stake, could not have produced that page.

The whole agitation, much ado as is made over it, strikes me as nothing more than a mere curiosity, a morbid phenomenon of the time. It is no doubt very

interesting to study such a phenomenon, but it is not the problem which I propose to discuss in this lecture. Do not, therefore, expect to hear from me anything like a direct refutation of the theory referred to. But, although it is not my aim, these lectures will serve as an indirect refutation should I be successful in attaining my object. To explain myself:

He who studies the creations of a poet, not merely considering each one as an isolated work of art, but seeking in those works the man who created them, sets himself no easy task—the task, namely, of discovering the spiritual unity of those works. This unity is not a fixed, rigid thing; it is unstable, mobile. The different works of the same poet reveal him to us from different sides, upon different stages of intellectual and moral development, filled with different ideas, subject to different moods. If to the picture of the poet which his works reveal we add

what we know of the outward circumstances of his life,—of the conditions, the influences, which shaped his development,—then the problem becomes more complicated, but at the same time more satisfactory: it is to find the accord between his life and his works. The solution, in so far as it can be reached, consists in an intuitive insight into the development of a definite intellectual personality.

This undertaking, when applied to Shakespeare, is complicated with extraordinary difficulties, chiefly for two reasons: first, on account of the greatness of his genius, and secondly, because we know so little of his life, and that which we do know is of a character which seems to bear no sort of proportion to the overwhelming spiritual importance of the man. To a coarse perception, to one who can conceive of spiritual greatness only in the powerful of the earth, this circumstance is doubly em-

barrassing. Shakespeare's outward life had none of that splendour and distinction which we should like to associate with the originator of his works; but one forgets that innumerable passages in these works themselves teach the lesson that the most unseemly covering often hides the richest treasure: think, for instance, of the choosing of the casket, in "The Merchant of Venice." And it is overlooked, too, that the most powerful impression left upon the discriminating reader of these masterpieces is that they give us far more than they promise, and that their author, too, can only be conceived as a man in whose appearance, bearing, position in life, his true greatness found a very imperfect expression.

Yet it is owing mainly to this fact, to this difficulty of reconciling Shakespeare's life and his works, that, I will not say the Bacon theory had its origin, but that it could become so widespread. And now we shall offer some reflections upon this

point. We will attempt to find a path which shall lead us to see that this unity of the poet and his creations is at least a possible, a conceivable one. We dare never hope to lift the veil which envelops the mystery of genius. The miracle presented to us by the phenomenon of Shakespeare will never be cleared up. But is it not so in all cases of a similar nature? Does not the real miracle, after all efforts at explanation, remain an unsolved mystery? Let us take Goethe, so near to us in time, concerning whose life we have such a wealth of knowledge —Goethe, who has himself deigned to give us an account of his development, and who in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* has presented a work which William Scherer once characterized as the "causal explanation of genius." "Causal explanation of genius"! If one could but speak of the causal explanation of even this one particular genius! But do we find this in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*?

Do we learn from it anywhere how Goethe's genius arose? No; at most we learn of certain conditions under which his genius developed in a particular direction. This is all; the real, the fundamental secret remains unrevealed. And likewise in regard to Shakespeare we must not raise our expectations too high. All that we can hope to attain is this: the knowledge that the inner development of the poet, as disclosed to us through his works, harmonizes with what we know of the historical Shakespeare; that, indeed, many of the circumstances of his life decidedly advanced his development. In my attempt to demonstrate this I shall not, of course, repeat in detail the biography of the poet; I will bring into prominence only those elements in it which are of significance for our purpose.

William Shakespeare was the eldest son and the first surviving child of his parents; he was, therefore, no doubt reared with

special love and solicitude. He grew up in a family which, upon a foundation of honest toil, had attained a comfortable prosperity, and must have enjoyed high esteem in Stratford. His father, John Shakespeare, both farmer and merchant,—not an unusual combination in such provincial towns,—was high bailiff in Stratford from Michaelmas, 1568, to Michaelmas, 1569. Again, in September, 1571, he was chosen first alderman. His mother, Mary Arden, was a member of one of the most highly respected families of the county of Warwick, one which distinctly belonged to the gentry.

Shakespeare grew up amid simple, rather primitive, surroundings; he could not look for the higher spiritual training to his parents. At the grammar school of his native city, which, according to the thoroughly credible testimony of one of his first biographers, he attended, he is said to have been initiated into the knowledge of Latin, the elements

of logic and rhetoric, and various other branches.

Most of his knowledge of such things was probably self-taught later on. And we may assume that during his school life he learned more from his communion with nature and with the little world of Stratford than he did upon the school bench.

Was this a misfortune? Can we assume that it would have been conducive to his development to have received a scholarly education, to have associated at an early age with men of wide culture, and to have had his attention turned to literature in his tender youth? In order to enable us to answer these questions we must try to present before us the spiritual physiognomy of Shakespeare as it is revealed to us by his writings.

There has rarely been a man at once so finely and so powerfully organized, so healthy, as Shakespeare. I speak of fineness of organization in the widest

possible sense: delicacy of the inward and outward sense, the highest susceptibility materially and spiritually, ethically and æsthetically. He was open to outward influences on every side of his nature, and every impression woke an echo within him. Nothing escaped his eye, his ear, and nothing was indifferent to him; he sought to comprehend everything; everything aroused in him pleasure or aversion, and, when more deeply stirred, joy or sorrow. He had a universal sympathy for all created things, above all, for man—a sympathy not stopping at the surface of things, but penetrating to their innermost being; a sympathy which animates the inanimate in nature, and which in human life enables him completely to put himself into another's place, and to judge humanly of his motives and actions. All that is beautiful in art or in nature finds in him a joyous, an ardent response; no noble action, no spark, however feeble, of noble

human endeavour, leaves him unmoved. The forms of social intercourse in their relation to the feelings and to character—who has ever so keenly felt their infinitely delicate shades? Nothing that offends good taste or shocks the æsthetic sense remains unnoticed by him. He has comprehension for every individual peculiarity, every idiosyncrasy, every mannerism, and can trace them to their source. In no poet, therefore, is the sense of the ludicrous so highly developed. But he does not content himself with a mere surface picture of even his most irresistibly laughable characters; not even they are too insignificant for him to sympathize with them, to enter into their nature, into their life. Toward them, too, he shows the good will he bears all creatures; in them, too, he honours humanity. No ring of scorn or mockery is heard in his laughter.

The influences for good that a youth spent in ever-renewed and intimate con-

tact with nature must have exerted upon a being so organized, seem evident. Country life, with its refreshing, invigorating air, could maintain the health and develop the strength, which, with a more artificial system of education, might have degenerated at an early age. The quiet content of what might be called a patriarchal life guarded this all too fine-strung spirit, this all too sensitive being, from a premature development of his instincts and talents—a development which in all probability would have led to a feverish exaltation, and have been his ruin, as it was of so many others of that time, particularly those dramatically gifted.

And, furthermore, that intimate intercourse with nature to which life in Stratford was so conducive was the best school for his mind, for his yet slumbering genius. Not only did it sharpen his senses, his powers of observation: he owes to it infinitely more. To a contemplative mind, one capable of high development, nature

presents wonders on every hand—wonders of a primitive kind, and therefore more in consonance with a child's spirit than those that are achieved by the intellect. Questions are suggested at every step; even the minutest, the most insignificant object reveals itself to the loving observer as a complete creation, one perfect within its limitations; and, again, in the contemplation of nature one recognizes more easily the connection between all beings, their dependence upon each other.

Shakespeare penetrated deep into the book of nature in his native place. Not only was his æsthetic sense captivated by the beauties of the surrounding landscape; not only did he retain all that presented itself before him as a harmonious whole, so that we find repeatedly in his works recollections of his home, of the Avon, gently winding its way through green meadows, dark woodland, pretty orchards: he also learned to observe every detail of the picture; every flower,

every plant, every animal, aroused his interest; he grew intimately acquainted with everything about him. Here was developed and brought into active play the poet's all-embracing sympathy; here, also, was laid the foundation of that extensive knowledge of nature of which his works bear proof, and which command the wonder and admiration of the botanist, the zoölogist, the physiologist, and leads them to the conjecture that Shakespeare must have devoted himself to a special study of each of these branches of science. He would hardly have gained that deep understanding of the life of nature had he grown up in a noisy, contracted town, in an atmosphere of high literary culture.

For Shakespeare looks upon nature as a poet, a child, as every nation in its infancy looks upon it. The change of the seasons, which influences even our moods, making us sad or gay, is regarded by the child of nature as the withdrawal or return of a great blessing: it is the propi-

tious gods who part from us and die away, to be rewakened in the spring. Every child's mind conceives myths of this nature, but above all a child who is destined to become a Shakespeare or a Goethe. For the historical significance and national importance of men of the highest order of genius consists in this: that, while developing the spirit peculiar to a people, they are, at the same time, its most perfect representatives; so that their life appears a miniature of that of their people—its past, its present, and its future are mirrored in them. We cannot doubt, then, that Shakespeare, too, in his childhood, revelled in myths. He sought to give a human significance to every manifestation of nature; everything was to him a picture, a symbol. And when, later, he had learned to distinguish the differences between similar things more sharply, the impressions received in childhood still clung to him; the habit, nay, the necessity, of thinking in pictures, of

expressing himself in pictures, still remained. And from the habit of comparing was developed the faculty of deducing a general truth from the observation of a single phenomenon by rapid analysis and combination. Thus his deep insight of later years into the relations of things should be taken in connection with the myth-making of his childhood.

The great advantage of a simple, primitive mode of life is that it guards a person from developing one side of his talents at the expense of the others. The division of labour, the chief factor in the progress of culture for humanity at large, has the necessary consequence that the individual perfects himself in one direction, and remains undeveloped in many others; that he is a giant in his own field, while in other fields he is infinitely more helpless than the child of nature. The unpractical scholar, the professor so childishly inexperienced in matters of everyday life, is a familiar figure to

everyone, if only from the pages of the comic newspapers. But how inexperienced do we often find the scholar even in domains of knowledge only slightly removed from his own! Shakespeare was preserved from such one-sidedness both by his nature and his education. He lived in a little town where rural work was combined with town occupations. His father was a farmer and merchant. Already in early youth he was brought into close contact with various forms of human activity. He accustomed himself to observe them all, to inquire into the aims, the methods, the implements, of each. And this habit he retained in later life. Thus it is that he knows the technical name of every object in every field of activity, that he can represent with such exactness every detail of work, complicated though it may be, in any trade. Hence the traditions or the hypotheses according to which Shakespeare is now a butcher, now a wool merchant, or,

again, a typesetter, a physician, or a soldier.

His powers of observation and combination thus exercised were, no doubt, turned by Shakespeare at an early age upon his own proper domain, the study of man. The little world which surrounded him, and the world within his own breast, offered him perfectly ample material for this study, and as his needs grew greater so also did the circle of his experiences widen.

The saying of Goethe is familiar: "Einen Blick ins Buch hinein und zwei ins Leben, das muss die rechte Form dem Geiste geben."

If there be any great poet or thinker in modern ages who was formed on this principle, it is Shakespeare. We have attempted to indicate how he may have gained his knowledge of life in Stratford. Of what significance books were to him we shall have occasion to learn in the course of our investigations.

The intellectual possessions of an age, of a people, are not limited to what is found in their literature. There is, and was particularly at that time, a fund of tradition transmitted through the customs and manners of the people, through their songs and their sayings, having the same underlying character, but assuming a multiplicity of different forms in different parts of the land. These things, too, form a prominent, an essential feature of the intellectual atmosphere surrounding man.

In the sixteenth century England still fully deserved the name of merry England. Puritan austerity of manners had not yet begun to scorn the gay, light-hearted festivals of the people, nor silence their merry songs. Old customs and ceremonies were observed with particular faithfulness in the country; at stated times of the year processions, games, dances, were organized, many of which had their origin in the dim, hoary

past, some echoing the spirit of the Teutonic myths. Among these belongs the May festival, and the morris dance which formed a part of it. Among them also belongs St. George's Day, the sheep-shearing festival, and many other feasts and games of which Shakespeare delighted to make mention in his dramas. Warwickshire must have been one of those English counties in which old usages, old traditions, maintained their strongest hold. It was a region where from the dawn of English history different races or different nationalities were brought into contact: first the West-Saxons and the Celts, then the West-Saxons and the Angles, the latter of whom conquered the former. Under Alfred the Great, after the decisive victory over the Danes, the boundary line between the West-Saxon-Mercian and the Danish dominion passed through Warwickshire. Old English records establish the fact that paganism here main-

tained a long life; the neighbourhood of the Danes, the comparatively great distance from the great centres of culture, must later have been favourable to the preservation of vestiges of heathen traditions.

Warwickshire was, also, according to all appearances, one of those districts where the old English national epic received its most powerful development. In the literary ages, on the contrary, we hear little or nothing of Warwickshire up to the second half of the sixteenth century. Scarcely one poet of eminence of the Old or Middle English period can be claimed with certainty for the heart of England, as Michael Drayton, a contemporary of Shakespeare, himself a native of Warwickshire, calls it. All the more vigorous was the growth of popular poetry. Here arose, as a consequence of the mingling of Danes and Saxons, the legend of Guy of Warwick, which, in the beginning of the thirteenth century, received a literary

form in the Norman tongue. Old charms, ballads, and such other forms of poetry as fall within the domain of folk-songs, may well have survived longer in Warwickshire than in many other counties, and had a relatively richer development. Poetry of this kind that found its way to Warwickshire from other regions, particularly such as came from northern England, was eagerly welcomed. The beautiful songs and legends of Robin Hood, in which the Old German storm god Woden assumes the national heroic form of an outlaw, of an archer and poacher, making the woods his home, and the kindred ballads of Adam Bell, William of Cloudesly, Clym o' the Clough—all filled with a fresh, woody odour, a primitive, light-hearted way of looking at life—found congenial soil in Warwickshire. Shakespeare's dramas are full of allusions to these ballads, as, indeed, no other poet of his time has drawn so deep as he from the well of national songs and legends.

Neither was there a lack of historical reminiscences in Warwickshire. Mighty remains of the Roman period, which in the sixteenth century were looked upon as the work of the Britons; cities and places associated with the names of famous races of men, with the history of great events, of terrible battles, were here found in abundance. Particularly did the sad time when the houses of Lancaster and York, engaged in a bloody feud, decimated the English aristocracy and desolated the land,—the time of the Wars of the Roses,—still live most vividly in the memory of the inhabitants of that county. The great hero of the Wars of the Roses, whom history and poetry have made familiar to us as the king-maker, was Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick.

Is it astonishing that Shakespeare should at the very outset of his dramatic career have been drawn to represent and artistically master that period of history of which he heard above all others in his

home? We must remember, too, that this was the period treated by Edward Hall in his chronicle.

It is not a matter of indifference where a man, especially a genius, is born—whether he is descended from a vigorous or a degenerate stock, what air he breathed in his childhood, what songs were sung to him in his cradle.

And so it may be no mere chance that Shakespeare was born in Warwickshire; there may be a connection between his origin and the particular direction taken by his genius. Shakespeare is the first among the great English poets since the Old English period in whom the Teutonic spirit again overpoweringly asserts itself, and presses into its service all those elements of foreign culture which were assimilated by the national character. In him we find again that soul-stirring note of deep feeling, that simple boldness of poetic expression, which plunges us, without preparation or mediation,—

apparently without any effort at artistic effect,—into the very heart of the subject; in short, he has that genuineness of sentiment which is a chief characteristic of Germanic poesy.

Shakespeare's boyhood seems to have been a very happy one. Later in life he looked back as to a lost paradise upon those days of innocence, of youthful joys and youthful friendships, upon the time when he looked no deeper into the future than to think "to-morrow will be another day like to-day, and I shall always be a boy," when he and his playfellows "gave innocence for innocence," and when it entered not their dreams that "men do evil" in the world.

About the time when Shakespeare, a boy of fourteen, may be supposed to have left school the horizon of his life began gradually to darken. In the first place, the hitherto prosperous circumstances of his family grew straitened, and then sank to lower and still lower depths. We

can follow clearly enough, in Stratford documents of the years 1578 to 1587, the sad development of affairs which plunged the Shakespeare family into poverty, led to the loss of their position, deprived its head, John Shakespeare, of the dignified office of alderman, and finally robbed him of his liberty, until, in the latter year, their misfortunes had reached a climax, but not yet their end.

The crisis in Shakespeare's life, the time which marks the transition from boyhood to youth, falls just within this period: the awakening of youthful longings and passions; first love, with its dreams, its rapture—here, alas! with its errors also, with its consequences that were to determine his whole life.

In November, 1582, we find William Shakespeare on the point of getting married—he, a lad of eighteen, to a girl eight years older than himself; on the point of getting married, as it appears, without the consent of his parents; en-

deavouring to obtain permission for his union from the Bishop of Worcester after a single proclamation of the banns. The marriage must have taken place soon after this. Already under the date of the 26th of May, 1583, the Stratford parish register records the baptism of Susanna, daughter of William Shakespeare.

And now picture to yourself this youthful head of a family in the first years succeeding his union: how the incompatibility between him and his wife, the difference in age itself forming a barrier, gradually dawns upon him; how he sees clearly the many prospects life and the world would have held out to him, feels the chains which render the struggle for existence so hard, and which he himself has forged; how, from day to day, the difficulty of satisfying the needs of his little family grows greater, and how the increasing disorder of his father's financial affairs at length makes his position

intolerable. It may well be that the young husband, overwhelmed by repentance, mortification, and despair,—a despair which rendered him utterly reckless,—may have attempted to shake off now and then the heavy burdens weighing upon him, and have taken part, in the company of wild fellows, in the maddest pranks. The tradition according to which Shakespeare led a dissolute life in Stratford with gay companions, and committed all kinds of mischief, particularly poaching, exaggerated and inexact as it is in some particulars, may contain a kernel of truth. The essential thing for us is this: if we seek to bring Shakespeare's condition during the years in question vividly before our minds, we come to the conclusion that it has in a comparatively short space of time passed through the whole compass of moods and feelings, from the most glowing ecstasy of passion to the chilling grief of blank disappointment, from the highest bliss to deepest

woe; and that we must date from this period the epoch when his knowledge of the world and of the human heart, and likewise his sympathy with human joys and sorrows, began to deepen.

And now followed Shakespeare's departure, or, if you will, his flight, to London. At the beginning of 1585 his family had been increased by a pair of twins, Hamnet and Judith, who were baptized on the 2d of February. It may be presumed that Shakespeare left his home soon after this to try his fortunes in the capital. We have no more precise knowledge of the time of that hegira, for in this part of the poet's biography there is a great gap. Up to the year 1592 we have no account of him whatever, and the first thing we then hear of him is that he has secured a perfectly firm footing in London and in his new sphere of action. The period between Shakespeare's arrival in the English capital and the year 1592, which we are

enabled to fill out only by conjecture and imagination, must have been of the highest import and greatest consequence in the poet's life. This is the time of his real struggle with the world, with destiny; the time, too, doubtless, of new and hard struggles with himself—all of them crises out of which he came forth not unscathed, it is true, but with a spirit matured and strengthened. It was at this period that the poet's spiritual horizon was so vastly widened, a consequence of being transplanted from the narrow, quiet life of Stratford to the busy mart of London.

And here we must try to realize the great historical era when England became conscious of her mission in Europe, and when, at the same time, she began to stretch out her arms toward the new transatlantic world; the time when the tide of English national life rose so high, and the spirit of nationality received so powerful an impulse; the time when

England, too, began to conquer a place for herself in the new domains of science, opened up by the intellectual awakening of Europe, and when English poesy ventured upon more daring flights than it had ever attempted before, and soared to heights which it has never, indeed, again attained. We must picture to ourselves the young provincial transferred at such an epoch to the streets of the great capital, with his unsophisticated ways, his fresh, alert mind, his keen powers of observation, rich, too, in a wealth of inner experiences, with his ardour for learning, his powers of assimilation and capacity for enthusiasm—above all, with that unconquerable strength, that versatility and perseverance, which in life's conflict never allowed him to succumb, stumble though he might. His interest in history and politics was then first really awakened; it was then that the gaps in his literary education were filled up, that he made the acquaintance of writers not only

of his own country, but of some of the great spirits of the ancient world and of foreign countries, notably of Italy, though in great part only at second-hand, through translations and adaptations. It was then that Shakespeare became conscious of his true vocation, and was introduced to that institution whose future was to be inseparably bound up with his own. Shakespeare did, no doubt, as tradition teaches us, begin at the very bottom of the ladder, and only gradually raised himself, as actor and dramatist, to a higher position. As early as 1592 he figures as the factotum of the company to which he belonged.

Of the many follies of which the Baconians are guilty the greatest is that they find it incongruous in a man of Shakespeare's position—an actor and dramatic manager—to have written works of such depth and grandeur. As if we could conceive of the greatest dramatist of all times without the most intimate

knowledge of the stage, such as can only be acquired by years of experience. And how inseparably united with the stage does Shakespeare show himself to be! how he loves to look at life through the scenes of the play, and, again, to see a play in the shifting scenes of life! How well he knows the capabilities of the actor and the requirements of the spectator! Why do we not find any thankless rôles in Shakespeare? Why do even his luxuriant diction and the intricate course of profound thought produce dramatic effect? Because he knows the stage; because, while writing his scenes, he not only beholds his personages living and breathing before him, hears their voices, sees their changing expressions, but also because these figures often appear before his mental vision with the familiar lineaments of particular actors.

That which stamps the works of Shakespeare as unique, that combination of deep and imperishable matter with the

most intense immediate effect, finds an explanation in the very fact that he belonged to the stage heart and soul, that be began his life's calling by connecting himself with the theatre, while his thoughts and reflections soared far beyond the narrow horizon of the flimsy boards. And here, again, we find characteristic features in his biography which offer us a glimpse into his inner life. We see the poet rising between the year 1592 and the year 1599 to the pinnacle of his art, and, at the same time, conquering for himself an assured and generally acknowledged position in the world of art and of society. Then in the first decade of the seventeenth century he produced his most profound, his grandest works. But before he had reached this highest point we see him taking the first steps toward securing a peaceful home for his future years in his native town. Shakespeare had never while in London lost sight of his home; as soon as he was able he had made

his people share in the dawn of his good fortunes; doubtless, too, he paid them frequent visits of longer or shorter duration. But already in the year 1597 he began to buy land in Stratford, to prepare the plan which he never afterward abandoned. And about the year 1609,—it may be somewhat sooner or later,—the long-cherished idea was at length realized. The poet left the stage and the capital and returned to his quiet home, to wood and meadow, to wife and child and grandchild, to pass his remaining days in noble leisure and the enjoyment of tranquil contemplation. Thus was the close of his life joined to its beginning, the circuit made beautifully complete.

The difference between the life of Shakespeare and that of his dramatic contemporaries is as great as that between their works.

He was the only one among them who did not receive an academic education, who was reared in modest circumstances,

in intimate intercourse with nature, being indebted more to life than to school for his education. At an earlier age than any of the others Shakespeare had, apparently, shaped his future in a way that warranted no hopes of greatness. But that which would have dragged another to his ruin acted upon him only as a spur to turn a new leaf in life with undiminished courage. Shakespeare entered into closer relations with the life of the theatre in London than any of his rivals. But, far from ruining himself body and soul in this dissolute whirl, as did so many others, he grew to be a man, an artist and poet, spiritually and materially self-sufficient and independent. Prosperous, honoured, famous, he then abandoned the stage and the capital, to end his life as a country gentleman in his native home.

SECOND LECTURE

THE CHRONOLOGY OF SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS

THE CHRONOLOGY OF SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS.

THE very natural and justifiable desire to learn something of the real qualities and habits of a poet, to observe him in *négligé*, as it were, after having become acquainted with the ideal side of his nature—this desire can, in the case of Shakespeare, as we have already intimated in our previous lecture, be but very imperfectly satisfied. Of the outward life of Shakespeare we know very little; but we know so much the more of his inner life. Though the sources of what is generally termed the biography of a poet flow but in a very scanty stream, we find in his works ample pages of his spiritual life unrolled before us. We see in them not only how the poet cultivated and perfected himself in his art, not only how his

view of man and the world grew more and more profound: we see in them what problems occupied him at different periods, what ideas filled his mind, by what moods he was swayed; and we are enabled to infer, to a certain degree, the experiences which preceded and gave direction to his successive creations.

Here, of course, one enters upon a field in which it is difficult to avoid a certain exaggeration. One generally sways too much to one side or the other of the golden mean. A most remarkable conception of what was termed Shakespeare's objectivity was formerly very widespread in Germany, and is perhaps not yet quite extinct. This objectivity was said to consist in this: that the poet in his creations always pictured certain definite personalities—Ophelia, Brutus, Othello, Falstaff—never his own struggles and strivings. Some, indeed, went so far as to think that even Shakespeare's sonnets threw no certain light upon his experiences. This

opinion rests upon an obscured perception of the process of poetic creation. Does not the poet himself enter into the work, as he lives and has his being, with all the feelings that agitate or oppress his heart? And the greater the poet the more earnestly he regards his work, the more clearly does he reveal himself in his productions; the more perfectly, therefore, will his individuality be stamped upon them. Where, indeed, shall the poet seek the stuff wherewith to furnish forth his characters if not in his own breast? Can it, then, be a matter of indifference what feelings agitate him at any given time? Is it possible to suppose, for instance, that Falstaff, as he appears in the first part of "Henry IV.," and Thersites, in "Troilus and Cressida," were conceived at the same time, born under the same auspices?

Let us not be deceived by words: the most objective poet is at the same time the most subjective. For his objectiveness consists only in his own inner wealth

and in his complete abandonment to every effort he undertakes. This sacred earnestness is the pre-eminent characteristic of Shakespeare's art. He enters so deeply into the problem before him, and into the objects which are to make that problem clear to himself, that he becomes merged in his own characters, and it is only then that his characters grow tangible and instinct with life. Shakespeare puts his own feelings into harmony with the dispositions, the circumstances, the moods, of his creations, so that he is able to speak in their name—in their name, and with their feelings, but in his own speech, from his own experience, and from the inmost depths of his own heart.

From this standpoint we can more readily avoid the other extreme to which one may be led in interpreting the poet's works. There have been commentators who have proceeded upon the theory that Shakespeare must himself have lived through all the things which he depicts

with such matchless reality, or that, at least, they came under his immediate observation. We need not dwell upon this very singular view. To us it seems self-evident that the real relationship existing between Shakespeare's own experiences and his creations lies much less in the events or subjects of either than in the kind of emotions aroused by them. And it is further evident that we can gather far more valuable revelations regarding the spiritual life of the poet by a connected study of all his works than by a microscopic analysis of a single one of his dramas. The esential thing, therefore, is not to restrict ourselves and consider each one of Shakespeare's productions as an isolated organism, but to regard them all as members of a greater organism. Only in this way shall we be able to force even a particular creation to disclose its individuality.

Such an inquiry naturally presupposes a general knowledge of the order in

which Shakespeare produced his works. Without chronology history is a chaos; and how could Shakespeare's writings appear to us as a great organism did we not know what place to assign to each?

But neither the poet himself nor any of his earlier editors has given us any intimation of the chronological sequence of his works. The determination of this sequence has long been and still remains a task for research. The learned Englishman Malone achieved some very meritorious work in this field about a hundred years ago. Since then the Germans have, on the whole, devoted more attention to the chronological inquiry than the English; and it is only in the last fifteen years, since the founding of the New English Shakespeare Society, that this study has, so to say, become the fashion in England.

Not upon all points do the scholars agree. In what matter, indeed, have they ever done so? Upon fundamental

points, however, competent scholars are in essential accord; and this should inspire in the layman a certain confidence in the method by which the results have been obtained. Allow me to initiate you to some extent into this method by briefly answering the following question: What materials have we at our command to enable us to determine the chronology of Shakespeare's plays? It is usual to begin with the distinction between internal and external evidence. I prefer to draw the distinction between relative and absolute chronology.

If I can prove that a certain work must be assigned to a certain year, or at least to a certain definite period of time, as, for instance, "Julius Cæsar" to the year 1601, then I have determined an absolute time. I have determined a relative time when I have established that a certain work must have been produced sooner or later than a certain other, or at about the same time. For example, "The Winter's

Tale" considerably later than "A Midsummer Night's Dream"; "Hamlet" not long before "Othello." To ascertain the relative time is the more important for us—it is what we are really seeking; but it is clear that the absolute time fully ascertained would include the relative. If we knew the exact year when each one of Shakespeare's works was produced, there would naturally be nothing left to investigate regarding their sequence.

But, in reality, we are compelled to deal in a combination of both elements—absolute and relative time—in order to obtain a comprehensive view. Let me give an example: Suppose we know the years which limit Shakespeare's productive period—let us assume from 1586 to 1613. If I know also that "Julius Cæsar" was written in 1601, I know, at the same time, that this piece belongs to the middle of Shakespeare's creative period, when his art reached its climax. On the other hand, if the whole struc-

ture of "The Comedy of Errors" shows me that this work must belong among the first creations of Shakespeare's muse, I am justified in concluding that it was written somewhere between 1580 and 1590.

It can be readily perceived that the means employed to determine *absolute* time are, as a rule, of a different kind from those which we use to ascertain relative time.

Here we have, first in order, the so-called external evidence.

A number of Shakespeare's works appeared separately during the poet's lifetime. We possess most of these old editions, which are variously dated.

More exact data are afforded us by the register of the "Company of Stationers," in which books that were to be printed had to be recorded, to protect the property rights of the publisher. Thus we have, in many cases at least, a very definite time limit before which a given work must have

been written. But sometimes circumstances are added which make it probable that the publication of a particular work occurred not long after its completion.

We gather similar information from the eulogistic or other reference to Shakespeare's writings by contemporary authors. Sometimes we have a distinct mention of the poet or his work, at other times an allusion more or less clear.

Particularly welcome are occasional dated accounts or even bare mentions of the representation of Shakespeare's plays, and the commonplace books and diaries of amateurs of the theatre or of a theatre director like Henslowe.

Precisely of the same service to us as an allusion to any of Shakespeare's works by his contemporaries is the use they made of them, in so far as it can be proved beyond doubt. It is, of course, here presumed that the contemporaneous mention or imitation is itself correctly dated.

In the opposite direction, but producing the same effect as the instances just cited, is the perception that Shakespeare on his side has made use of the work of a contemporary, praises it, ridicules it, makes allusions to it. In certain cases this may occur in such a way as to create a positive impression that the contemporary work in question must have just become known when it gave rise to Shakespeare's words. This applies above all in the case of political or other events of the time, to which the poet now and then makes reference; as a rule, such an allusion was only comprehensible and effective while the impression created by the event in question was still a general and powerful one.

As to determining the *relative* chronology, that is, the sequence in which Shakespeare's works were produced, we have criteria at our command which, on the whole, are of a more subtle nature. somewhat less tangible, than those just indicated, but the investigation of which

will, for that very reason, be of greater interest to you.

Let us begin with a remark which sounds somewhat paradoxical: the poet makes use not only of others, but more particularly of himself, his own writings, and he likewise makes allusions in his later works to his earlier ones. This is not always done so palpably as to be at once apparent to a dull perception. When we see "The Merry Wives," the Falstaff who appears in that piece necessarily reminds us of the character of the same name in "Henry IV." and no one can doubt that the comedy of "The Merry Wives" presupposes "Henry IV.," and that, therefore, it must have been produced later, but yet not much later. The matter is, however, not always so clear; indeed, the poet himself may be unconscious that one of his former creations is exercising a subtle influence upon his mind. The following appears to me to exemplify what I have in my mind:

In one of those fateful monologues spoken by Macbeth before his awful deed—the one which begins with the words:

"If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly"—

he weighs the consequences of his intended crime:

"But in these cases
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips."

"He who for others lays a snare is caught in it himself," is a familiar proverb. But why was it just the poisoned chalice that occurred to Shakespeare? The case, surely, is not a usual one that a person with the intention of killing another should poison a cup and then in some way be put in a position to drink it himself. It is hardly to be doubted that a scene of one of his own dramas passed before his mind. You remember the highly symbol-

ical concluding scene in "Hamlet" where the crime contrived by the king in conjunction with Laertes recoils upon its originators, and where Hamlet finally forces the king to drink the cup which the latter had prepared for him, and of which the queen through some mistake had already drunk. "Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, drink off this potion"; whereupon the dying Laertes says: "He is justly served; it is a poison tempered by himself." It is not probable that in making Macbeth speak those lines it was Shakespeare's object to allude to the catastrophe in "Hamlet." Involuntarily, however, justice presented itself to him in the image of that scene.

This example may serve for many. An event, a scene, becomes condensed, in course of time, into a single idea, an image. And it is this very factor, allow me to remark in passing, upon which the intellectual progress of mankind essentially depends. The thought toward

which one generation has painfully struggled becomes the assured possession of the next—expressed without effort in a single word, and used as a basis for the discovery of new truths.

Another but kindred case is where the poet having made use of a certain motive in a former creation, recurs to it in a later work, conceiving it from a new point of view, presenting it under new circumstances. Call to mind, for instance, jealousy as portrayed in "Othello," "The Winter's Tale," and "Cymbeline," regicide pictured in "Julius Cæsar," "Hamlet," "Macbeth." In very many cases it will be possible to determine where a given motive was first employed, where it is repeated.

What has been said in regard to motives is applicable in its widest sense to situations, passions, problems, types of character. The infinite wealth and variety of Shakespeare's characters may be divided into groups, within which a

certain kinship is perceptible. We can find forerunners to nearly all the important figures of Shakespeare's maturest dramas in some sketch or preparatory study in a former work.

Everything, finally, points to the conclusion that we are enabled to show in Shakespeare's works more clearly than in the productions of many other great poets a twofold development. It is the growth, the perfection, of two things, which Goethe expresses when he says:

> "Der Gehalt in deinem Busen
> Und die Form in deinem Geist"—

"the substance in thy heart, the form in thy mind."

If we look upon Shakespeare's creations as a whole, we see clearly how, on the one hand, his experience, his knowledge of men and the world, grow always richer, his intuition keener, and, on the other hand, how his style is constantly being perfected. Let us linger a moment over this second point. In studying a

poet or an artist one must, of course, give some attention to his style; indeed without this it is difficult and often impossible to comprehend the true significance of his works.

When I speak of Shakespeare's style, I mean, in the broadest possible sense of the words, the form in which he expresses what he has to say,—the composition of his works, the structure of his scenes, no less than his expressions considered individually, his language sensuous and figurative, his verse with its melodious flow and its dramatic motion. If we attempted to characterize Shakespeare's style in a word, we should have to say: Abundance, directness, reality. Shakespeare's spiritual vision is at once most comprehensive and exceedingly keen. He distinguishes the details of a group, sees things never flat, but always plastic; he penetrates into their inmost depths. He has the most wonderful faculty of seeing at once the essential

thing and its attendant circumstances, and of reproducing the whole in his mind. And what he sees he will and must express, saying too much rather than too little. To this must be added that, although Shakespeare lays out the great groundwork of his creations with a firm hand, and after mature deliberation, he relies for the details absolutely upon the inspiration of the moment. He may not at once find the right word; often must he wrestle with the genius of language, wrestle as Jacob did with the Lord, saying: "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." Now what is peculiar to Shakespeare is that if he has used a word or a figure which does not satisfy him, and then employs another, he does not efface the first, but leaves it undisturbed in its place, and allows himself to drift on upon the swelling current of his thoughts. We know from the collected edition of his plays, and learn also from Ben Jonson, that it was a fact

known to the actors who played with Shakespeare that he never used to cross out anything in his manuscripts; and we can readily believe this: his whole diction bears this stamp of natural growth. If he wants to say: Your father is no more, we have in "Macbeth":

"The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood
Is stopp'd; the very source of it is stopped."

We see Shakespeare's style constantly developing in all the directions we have indicated; yet this development is not a constant and unqualified advance toward a greater perfection in art. On the contrary, the case may be stated somewhat as follows:

From the style of his youthful productions, which are often more remarkable for their richness and beauty than for their spiritual significance, he rises to the crowning point of his power, where form and matter are most perfectly balanced. The spiritual substance then grows ever richer and mightier, and finally threatens

the sacrifice of form. More and more do the thoughts and strivings of the poet concentrate themselves upon the very heart of things, going far beyond the horizon of the stage. His thoughts flow in an ever-swifter stream, his expressions growing always more pithy, always harder to interpret; his verse loses the even flow, the harmonious sound, which formerly characterized it, but it becomes always more expressive, more stirring, more dramatic. While before the rhythm appeared upon the surface, it now lies deep below. The verses in themselves are often broken and disjointed. But through them all we seem to hear the magnificent rhythm, the sublime music, of Shakespeare's thought, almost the very pulse-beats of his heart.

A familiar example will illustrate my remarks concerning his increasing terseness of expression. I select two representations of the same subject, between which there is not even a long interval—probably only about six years; they are

not, therefore, characteristic either of his youthful or of his latest work. In the second part of "Henry IV." we hear the sick and weary king thus bewail his inability to sleep:

"How many thousand of my poorest subjects
Are at this hour asleep! O sleep, O gentle sleep,
Nature's soft nurse, how have I frighted thee,
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down,
And steep my senses in forgetfulness?
Why rather, sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,
Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee,
And hush'd with buzzing night-flies to thy slumber,
Than in the perfumed chambers of the great,
Under the canopies of costly state,
And lull'd with sound of sweetest melody?
O thou dull god, why liest thou with the vile
In loathsome beds, and leav'st the kingly couch
A watch-case or a common 'larum-bell?
Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge
And in the visitation of the winds,
Who take the ruffian billows by the top,
Curling their monstrous heads, and hanging them
With deafening clamour in the slippery clouds,
That, with the hurly, death itself awakes?
Canst thou, O partial sleep, give thy repose
To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude,

And in the calmest and most stillest night,
With all appliances and means to boot,
Deny it to a king? Then, happy low, lie down!
Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

And in "Macbeth" we hear the regicide immediately after the deed:

" Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep,' the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast."

No fewer images in the second extract than the first; but there what picturesque delineation! and here what compactness and cogency! What experience of life lies in this expression alone: "Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care"!

We shall now endeavour to sketch in outline the principal epochs in Shakespeare's development, especially as regards the spiritual life of the poet.

The *first epoch* extends from the year 1586 or 1587 to the year 1593, or somewhat beyond that time. Its close

about coincides with the death of Marlowe, Shakespeare's great predecessor in tragedy. In the domain of tragedy—in all his grave dramas—Shakespeare's productions, particularly at the beginning, are strongly under Marlowe's influence; while in the domain of comedy, where he likewise had his predecessors, he appears to us thoroughly original from the first. It is at this period that Shakespeare gradually grows conscious of his own powers, while testing them in the various branches of his art. At the head of his series of works stands a tragedy, "Titus Andronicus," a drama bloody and full of horrors, which one would gladly miss from his Shakespeare, and whose authorship English criticism would, therefore, gladly deny the poet. But, nevertheless, it proves to be his creation. When the poet wrote "Titus Andronicus," he was evidently but dimly conscious of his own strength, and allowed himself to be influenced in his production more by outward

impulses, by the tendency to imitation, than by the powers and the needs of his own inner nature. It was, in its way, a premature effort. The young poet had, indeed, a correct foreshadowing of the development and expression of tragic passion; but tragedy seemed still to him a thing entirely strange and unfamiliar; he thought it demanded altogether peculiar characters, abnormal conditions, things of horror. His strong young nature had, it is true, tasted much of the earnestness and bitterness of life, but experience had not yet forced its tragic impress upon this burgher's son of Stratford.

He who wants to know what Shakespeare really was in the beginning of his dramatic career must study him in his earliest comedies. In them we have indeed the spontaneous utterances of his genius and his moods. In them is revealed a fresh and vigorously hopeful view of the world, a clear and already delicate conception of life; but the merry

scene is never without its serious background, such as experience, reflection, or presentiment trace upon the poet's soul. At first sad recollections seem to cast their shadows like spring clouds about him. They are dissipated, and all is again bright. Yet new shadows appear upon the horizon. New experiences, new passions, await the poet, and in battling with them he grows conscious of his strength, and from ever-deeper sources of his spirit does he draw the treasures with which he invests the children of his fancy.

In the "Comedy of Errors" the interest centres more in the complication of the action than in the characters, just as the irresistibly comic elements in the play are evolved almost entirely from the situations. The poet's sympathies seem most warmly enlisted in the doubtful fortunes of the family torn asunder by such strange circumstances, and finally reunited. In the presentation of the brother who seeks his brother and

mother, and who feels the danger of being himself lost in the strange, great city, lonely and forsaken in the wide world, we seem to hear an echo of the emotions Shakespeare himself must have experienced after his arrival in London: a drop in the ocean, in danger of losing himself in its depths. Admirably has the poet succeeded in depicting the somewhat faded, suspicious wife, who torments her husband with her jealousy. He ventures forward but timidly in his descriptions of love, yet the few love passages are delicately interpreted.

In "Love's Labour's Lost" the plot is reduced to a minimum; he unrolls before us a picture of character and manners in which the culture and the false culture of the time are represented with a great deal of gaiety, certain excrescences of humanistic learning and of puritanic overzeal are effectually ridiculed, and in which the inalienable rights of nature are defended against arbitrary precepts. The

situations are here produced essentially by the characters themselves, and it is from them in great part that the comic effects spring. The poet's wit and his humour, too, begin here powerfully to unfold. A youthful, joyous love of life forms the keynote of the comedy, a decided pleasure and interest in the things of this world, a naïve, kindly enjoyment of sport and jest; but all these upborne by lofty sentiments and a striving for the beautiful. We here find the first of Shakespeare's ideal female characters, and as the whole play teaches the omnipotence of love, so does the poet himself betray the secret of his youthfully vigorous, aspiring art when he puts this into the mouth of his favourite character:

"And when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods
Makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.
Never durst poet touch a pen to write
Until his ink were temper'd with Love's sighs;
O, then his lines would ravish savage ears,
And plant in tyrants mild humility."

A more serious note is struck in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," the first one of the really romantic comedies. Shakespeare here ventures to treat a deeper moral problem: faith and inconstancy in love and friendship; and he succeeds in producing the vacillating Proteus, the noble, manly, self-sacrificing Valentine, the queenly Sylvia, and, above all, Julia, the touching image of womanly grace and devotion. Yet there is an impression of immaturity left upon the mind, arising from the disproportion between the plot and its *dénouement*. The betrayer of friend and lover does not expiate his guilt; the faithful friend develops an unreasonable generosity, the consequences of which are frustrated only by a lucky accident. We feel in Shakespeare's "Sonnets" how this may be explained. He could himself be as unselfish, as passionately devoted in friendship, as Valentine. The last scene in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" gives us a glimpse

into Shakespeare's state of feelings at a time when his character was not yet perfectly formed, while his great heart overflowed with feelings of romantic, self-sacrificing devotion.

And then a notable theme offered itself to him—one which had already attracted many poets, and which came to his hands in quite a perfected shape. In the pathetic tale of Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare found tragedy without having to seek it; and he wrote his tragedy of youth, the lofty song of love, a consummate work of art. The transporting fire of youthful passion which it breathes, the glow of the springtide of life which irradiates the whole, lend it an undying charm. "I know but one tragedy which Love itself has helped to create," says our own Lessing, "and that is 'Romeo and Juliet.'" Love coming into a world filled with hate, inspiring and perfecting two noble young beings, but at the same time leading them to a tragic doom—such

is the old yet ever new burden of this tragedy.

Soon after, a marriage celebration incited the poet to present in the most daring symbols the mysterious power of love, in his play of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Here he gave his fancy the reins, and showed, as he created Titania and Oberon, and then, again, a Bottom, that nothing in the broad domain of poesy was to him impossible or unattainable. The moral maturity of the poet appears, however, most strikingly in the figure of Theseus, with his manly character, his delicacy of feeling, and his broad humanity.

In the meantime the dramatist had already turned his attention to the national domain of art—the dramas of the English kings.

In "Henry VI." he had presented the bloody Wars of the Roses—presented them in a patriotic spirit, with a strong intuitive grasp of history, with an art

which, though still imperfect, rises, as the work progresses, to a higher level. And now, at the end of this first epoch, he created his "Richard III.," that demoniacal figure of a king who forms the close of the English Middle Ages: half hero, half demon, heir of the horrible civil wars between the houses of York and Lancaster, armed, like an embodied Fate, with the flaming sword of Justice, to avenge long heaped-up wrongs, and to make the innocent suffer for the sins of their fathers. Even this monstrous being has the poet made us understand, brought him nearer to us on the common ground of humanity.

On the confines between his first and second periods Shakespeare rested from his dramatic labours in order to devote himself to epic-lyric poetry of the style of the court. The poems "Venus and Adonis" and "Lucrece," the first published in 1593, the second in 1594, belong to this category—both studies in a field in which he does not feel at home, but in

which he displays, nevertheless, a great deal of skill: "Venus and Adonis" breathing a glowing sensuality, "Lucrece" revealing the greatest moral and spiritual depth.

The *second period* of Shakespeare's activity extends to the beginning of the seventeenth century, and one of the characteristics which at once distinguishes it from the first is concentration. The poet here limits his dramatic productions to two kinds, comedy and historical plays, and he carries both of these forms of art to the highest point of their development.

The two works which stand at the head of this period—"The Taming of the Shrew" and "King John"—owe their elaboration only to Shakespeare, and not their rougher outlines—a proof of his growing appreciation of art, as well as of his increased estimation in the world of letters. Both works show in a striking manner how the poet, now in the plenitude of his youthful strength and manhood,

delighted in moral worth in uncouth, nay, in coarse, forms. We meet characters of a more refined, more ideal type in "The Merchant of Venice," whose central figure is the high-spirited Portia, with the sinister but imposing figure of Shylock as a contrast. But the thought which runs through the first two works—that it is not outward show and appearance, but genuine worth, that tells—is here again dwelt upon with great emphasis, and strikingly symbolized.

And that this thought continues to occupy the poet's mind is evidenced by his next great work, that stupendous series of historical dramas which begins with "Richard II." and ends with "Henry V."—a work unmatched in its kind in any other literature—with its prodigious wealth of creations (I shall remind you only of the figure of Sir John Falstaff) and its wonderful political wisdom. We see the poet concerned not only with the past, but with the future of his country,

and while he describes the characters and fortunes of three of the English kings with historical impartiality and the keen-sighted vision of a prophet, he pictures the youngest of them, Henry of Monmouth (afterward Henry V.), as the ideal of sturdy manhood on the throne, a type of the simple, thoroughly human, God-fearing, heroic German king of the people. "Man should act, *earn* his reward." Shakespeare felt this need, too, especially now when he was rapidly approaching the meridian of life. In what does a man's worth consist? What are the practical ideals toward which he should strive? These are the questions Shakespeare put, and answered in his own way. It is nothing that his hero is a king and he himself a poet and actor. The attribute of real manhood they both possess in common. And what it is that constitutes true greatness, true honour, the poet shows us in his favourite character among kings.

From the serious, exhausting labour of his historical dramas Shakespeare, as if in need of recreation, now turned again to comedy. First he gave the great series a mirthful afterpiece in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," and then he wrote those three immortal plays in which his humour and his powers of comic creation are at their highest, those delicate flowers of his fancy, "Much Ado about Nothing," "As You Like It," and "Twelfth Night; or, What You Will." They transport us to an Arcadian world, amid charmingly romantic surroundings, and among a people who live,—it being virtually their only concern,—a life of the emotions.

These three comedies bring us chronologically to the threshold of a new century. With the year 1601 begins a new period in Shakespeare's development, a glaring contrast to the one preceding it. It is as if one stepped from a radiant, sunlit landscape into a bleak mountain

region with its topmost summits shrouded in mist. How can we account for this complete change in Shakespeare's mood? The history of the time and the occurrence of certain events give us the explanation. At the beginning of the year 1601 London was agitated by the conspiracy and rebellion of the Earl of Essex. What relations existed between Shakespeare and the brilliant and once so powerful favourite of the queen, is, indeed, not quite clearly established. Everything points to the fact, however, that Essex took a very deep interest in the poet's works, and that the poet followed the eventful career of the earl with warm and eager sympathy. It is, of course, well known that Essex and many of his followers expiated their desperate deed upon the scaffold, and that the Earl of Southampton, Shakespeare's friend, although his life was spared, remained in prison until the end of Elizabeth's reign. The grave feelings aroused in Shakes-

peare by these events caused him to turn his attention once more to affairs of state. The ancient world with its sublime figures, made familiar to him through Plutarch (in Sir Thomas North's translation), now recurred vividly to his fancy, and as before he alluded in "The Merchant of Venice" to the "ancient Roman honour," and to "Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia," so now he brings this Roman Portia herself upon the scene, and in her husband pictures one of the noblest representatives of Roman honour, drawn by a tragic destiny into a fatal conspiracy. The tragedy of "Julius Cæsar" forms the opening of the third period and of the series of Roman plays, which the editors of the Folio class among the tragedies, rightly distinguishing them from the historical dramas of the English kings. From a more critical standpoint they occupy an intermediate position between the two classes of plays, particularly "Julius Cæsar," which, therefore,

appropriately marks the close of the preceding and the opening of the third period.

Immediately after "Julius Cæsar" followed a tragedy which also in its way marks the beginning of a new epoch, although it is closely connected in many respects with the dramas just spoken of. I mean "Hamlet." "Hamlet" marks the moment when Shakespeare had reached the fullest maturity and mastery in his own most special domain, the domain of tragedy. It stands deservedly at the head of the dramas known under the name of "the tragedies," those grandest creations of the tragic Muse in all literature. Each one has its own peculiar excellences, some points in which it surpasses the others. None of them can rival "Hamlet" in its truth to nature, and its wealth of psychological delineation. "Othello," which follows directly upon "Hamlet" (1604), surpasses all the others in the strength of its dramatic effects, culminat-

ing in the third act, which is indeed, dramatically, the most thrilling act in all his writings. The succeeding tragedy, "Macbeth," stands alone by its grand simplicity of conception and the originality of its execution, giving us in a few bold strokes a consummate picture of the strange workings of a human soul. But it is in "King Lear" that the poet attains the summit of his tragic powers. We shall, later on, give more detailed attention to this play.

Higher than in "Lear" Shakespeare could not rise. Yet the plays which he next wrote show in no way a diminution of his poetic powers. There is nothing more amazing than Shakespeare's productiveness at this period, the first eight years of the seventeenth century. Works of richest content and most consummate art follow each other, stroke upon stroke. But before we continue to consider them in their regular order we must retrace our steps, and at least mention two plays

which we have overlooked, two comedies, fraught with profound meaning—one, written not long before, the other, not long after, "Hamlet": "All's Well That Ends Well" and "Measure for Measure," in many respects closely related to each other. A woman is the central figure in both dramas; in "All's Well That Ends Well" the strong, high-minded Helena, who loves the unworthy Bertram, and, undaunted by his coldness and treacherous disloyalty, does not rest until she has conquered his affections, when, from the vantage ground of love, she may make him happy and a worthier man. In "Measure for Measure," which, by its sombre tone no less than by the weight of the problem it treats, oversteps the bounds of comedy and suggests tragedy, we have Isabella, a grave and impressive Portia, who preaches the duty of mercy as well as justice, and contrasts human and divine justice with sublime irony; who, to save her brother's life would gladly sacrifice her own, but

who values virtue more than life itself, more than the life of her brother.

In the tragedy which succeeds upon "Lear," in "Coriolanus," we meet with a new type of woman, though akin to the character of Isabella: the type of the Roman matron of the good old time, elevated by the practice of womanly and patriotic duties, rivalling, nay, surpassing, men in their sense of honour, as exemplified in the venerable figure, unbent by the weight of years, of Volumnia, the mother of Coriolanus. In Coriolanus himself the poet represents the lofty aristocrat, the proudly modest hero, glowing with fiery patriotism, who loves glory above all else; who, infuriated by the coarse vulgarity and the ingratitude of the populace, which rewards his services by banishing him from Rome, strikes at the very root of his life's ideal, and joins the enemies of his country. It is only his mother who succeeds in winning him back to the path of duty, where, as he has foreseen, he meets

an inglorious death. We have in this tragedy the same leading ideas as in "Macbeth" and "Lear"—ambition and the results of ingratitude, here blended together, and transferred to the field of history and politics. "Coriolanus" is likewise remarkable for its depth of political insight, its subtlety of psychological intuition, and the living power of its dramatic construction.

In "Antony and Cleopatra," the third in the series of Roman dramas, we see, for the first time since "Romeo and Juliet," a woman share on an equal footing with the principal character in the action of a Shakesperean tragedy. But what a contrast between Juliet and Cleopatra: one, a young girl, scarce more than a child, whom the might of a pure and unselfish passion transforms into a woman, whose whole being is absorbed by this love which consummates her character and her life; the other, a courtesan of genius, if I may say so, with experi-

ence of life and the world, devoted to pleasure, practised in all the arts of seduction, endowed by nature with an alluring witchery, to whom the fire of her love for Antony alone lends a glimmer of womanly dignity. Artistically considered, Cleopatra is, perhaps, the masterpiece among Shakespeare's female characters; given the problem, Shakespeare has solved it as no one else could have done. But what conflicts must his soul have endured, what bitter experiences must he have passed through, to have set himself such a problem, to have created a woman so widely different from all those he had pictured before—a woman so devoid of the ideal womanly graces, yet so irresistible, for whose sake Antony sacrifices the dominion of the world.

The poet's mood grows ever more gloomy and bitter. Upon "Antony and Cleopatra" follows "Troilus and Cressida," neither tragedy nor comedy, but a sting-

ing satire. Here, too, the poet represents a courtesan, but one devoid of Cleopatra's demonic fascination—an ordinary coquette, a sensual, wanton, faithless woman, like so many of her kind. With merciless hand Shakespeare rends the rosy veil which Chaucer's optimism had cast over this subject; and as Cressida is an ordinary courtesan, so is Troilus a melancholy, sensual, sentimental dreamer; Pandarus, simply the common pander.

And just as ruthlessly does he demolish the tradition nourished in the Middle Ages regarding the legend of Troy and its heroes, and dispel the glamour of chivalry with which the mediæval poets had invested them. Even the simple greatness of Homer, as revealed to him through Chapman's translation, cannot convert him from his pessimism; on the contrary, the character of Thersites, which he takes from the Iliad, plays in his drama a very different part from that in the epic.

In spite of the admirable characterization in "Troilus and Cressida," and in spite of the host of imperishable sayings marked by a wealth of practical wisdom, there is no other drama of Shakespeare which appeals to us so little, which creates so unpleasing an impression.

But this bitterness of spirit had not yet reached its climax: it only culminates in the Titanic outbursts of fury of Timon, who, from being an unreasoning philanthropist, becomes a raging misanthrope—becomes transformed into a Lear, and, if I may so express it, into a systematic Lear, to whose eyes all nature seems to partake of the degenerateness of the human race, and who includes in his curse, upon which he rings so many changes with a grim delight, all created things.

In the course of the year 1608 a reaction takes place in the poet's mind. With diffidence we question his biography to see whether it can throw any light on the matter. The answer we

receive is of great significance. In December of the preceding year Shakespeare's youngest brother, the actor, died. The death of this poor fellow, who had chosen a vocation whose reproach Shakespeare had grown to feel more and more intensely, and which he contemplated soon leaving himself, may have been one of the elements which roused him to the mood in which "Timon" was written. But already in the preceding June a joyous event had taken place in the poet's family: his oldest daughter, Susanna, then twenty-four years of age, had been married to a physician of Stratford, who was held in high esteem and had a large practice. The first and only fruit of this union, Elizabeth Hall, Shakespeare's granddaughter, was born in February, 1608. We can imagine how this event helped to mark an era in the poet's inner life. There is nothing so well calculated to vanquish pessimism, to revive hope in the future and pleasure in life, as the

actual experience of seeing our own life renewed and rejuvenated in a new generation. Even the death of Shakespeare's mother, which occurred in September of the same year, painfully as it must have affected the poet, must under the circumstances have been easier to bear; it may have rendered him tender and brooding, but not harsh.

The dramatic production of this epoch is "Pericles," which, like "Timon," is only partially the work of our poet; but how different from "Timon"! Joyless, gloomy, at its inception, all here takes a favourable turn. Marina, born upon the sea, richly endowed by the gods, parted from her parents, after passing through varied fortunes, and escaping victorious from trying temptations, is by the grace of the gods and her own maidenly dignity reunited with her people. Thus does she restore to the world herself and her father, who, so long and so sorely tried, had been plunged in deepest melancholy. It is

precisely this story of Marina that forms Shakespeare's part of the play.

Soon after writing "Pericles" Shakespeare left London and returned to Stratford. Perhaps he had the intention to bid farewell to poetry as well. If such was the case, he was soon to learn that an old love cannot be discarded. As affairs of business,—and perhaps not these alone,—still often led him to make short visits to London, so did the dramatic Muse more than once appear to him in his rural seclusion.

The three dramas which specially mark this *Stratford period*—"The Tempest," "Cymbeline," and "The Winter's Tale"—bear distinct traces of the time and place of their origin. They breathe the fresh scent of wood and meadow, and a reflection of the cheerful calm of rural life lies spread over them. Of the requirements of the stage these plays take less heed. Whether they should be classed rather under comedy or tragedy, it is difficult to say;

they are romantic dramas in which the action, earnest, almost tragic, yet culminates happily. Passion does not here reach the height it attained in the great tragedies; but in psychological truth, in poetical creative power, in profundity of thought, these plays are in no wise inferior. A development which is characteristic of the poet's whole career here reaches its climax: year by year we see the substance, as opposed to the form, assuming mightier proportions, decidedly subordinating the latter. Here it has come to a point where the substance almost threatens the destruction of form. Ideas crowd upon the poet so thick and fast that he no longer pauses to express each individual one clearly. Shakespeare's diction, which in the first period bears a strong lyric stamp, in the great historical plays a rhetorical colouring, and which in the great tragedies grows more and more terse and dramatic, assumes here a form so condensed, frequently frag-

mentary, with images and varied forms of expression crowding upon each other, that the meaning often becomes obscure and enigmatical. And in a like manner does his verse in these dramas of the last period assume the greatest degree of freedom; it has become an instrument which he treats with a royal arbitrariness, which he often shatters, but which still resounds with the irresistible torrent of his thoughts.

The spirit which animates these dramas is that wisdom which finds a joy in living, and accepts all things with cheerful resignation, with a quiet faith in the higher powers which guide the world, and an all-embracing and all-forgiving love. Joy, reconciliation, is the final accord in them all.

That which was done by anticipation, as one might say, in the three brilliant comedies of the second period appears here as the perfectly ripened fruit of a life rich in experience, like gold that emerges

tried and proved from the fire after a long process of refinement. Here, too, are we transported to Arcadia, but never more to leave it. Thus we see some of the motives of the comedies of the last period reappear, but in variations of a richer, graver character. We are reminded of "As You Like It" in all three of the dramas, but notably in "The Tempest," where, in the exiled Prospero, living on the lonely island, we have the good duke of the forest of Arden in an idealized form. The Hero of "Much Ado about Nothing" rises in "A Winter's Tale" to the lofty figure of Hermione, and Imogen, in "Cymbeline," reminds us in many ways of Viola in "Twelfth Night." All these characters bear marks of having passed the tests of the tragic period; and we also have a return of personages and ideas that figured in the great tragedies. Prospero's mildness and wisdom shine out in bright contrast to Lear and Timon. Othello's jealousy reappears in Post-

humus and Leontes. And, to make the circle quite complete, the poet recurs to his first comedies. Everywhere the miraculous interposition of the higher powers, whether they reveal themselves through the voice of an oracle, or, as to the sleeping Posthumus, in "Cymbeline," appear in a visible shape. The grave passages in the "Comedy of Errors," that has so miraculously happy an ending, are symbolic of all these dramas. And "A Midsummer Night's Dream," too, is revived in "The Tempest," where the poet's fancy soars with still mightier flights into the regions of the spirit world, and produces, besides, in his Caliban, the most daring creation of his genius, a being hovering on the borderland between man and beast.

After "The Tempest," "Cymbeline," and "The Winter's Tale". Shakespeare seized his pen once more, to write in conjunction with the poet Fletcher the play of "Henry VIII.," and there to

delineate, above all, the majestic figure of Katharine.

These were the last utterances of his poetic genius. In this gentle, lofty spirit, this peaceful, tranquil mood, he bade farewell to art. And thus must he a few years later have closed his life.

THIRD LECTURE

SHAKESPEARE AS DRAMATIST

SHAKESPEARE AS DRAMATIST.

MUCH as judgments may differ regarding Shakespeare, all critics may be said to agree in acknowledging him to be pre-eminent among dramatists, either of all times, or at least of modern ages as contrasted with classic antiquity. And to dispute this judgment would least of all befit Germans, whose own classic writers, and especially those distinguished for dramatic power, have evidently learned so much from Shakespeare; to whose stage, since it cannot subsist upon the novelties of the day alone, Shakespeare is more indispensable than any other poet.

If we want to see clearly at a glance what Shakespeare signifies to us as a dramatist, let us imagine the repertory of our stage without "Hamlet," "Macbeth,"

"Othello," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Winter's Tale," "Julius Cæsar," "Coriolanus," "The Taming of the Shrew," "Twelfth Night," and whatever other Shakespearean plays are presented to us; imagine us without Schiller, or at least with an entirely different, much tamer Schiller in his place; imagine that we had only half a Lessing, half a Grillparzer, no Kleist, and no Hebbel; then estimate what this would mean in the development of our drama, of the histrionic art, and, furthermore, in the realm of poetry, of æsthetics, nay, in our whole culture.

No modern dramatist can even approach comparison with Shakespeare. Just figure to yourself the prodigious fertility of this poet, the multitude of his dramatic productions; and in this multitude we find no zeros, nor any mere numbers, pieces which the memory is in danger of confounding one with another, as may easily happen with the purely

superficial Spanish writers, who were even more prolific than Shakespeare. For each one of his dramas has a distinct form and physiognomy which stamp themselves indelibly upon the mind; each one represents a small world within itself—and in each of these worlds what teeming abundance of life! what rich variety of characters! Nothing enables us to estimate so clearly the creative power of a dramatist as the effort to bring before our minds bodily, as it were, the characters who owe him their being. No poet can enable us to do this as readily as Shakespeare; no poet can summon up such a host of spirits, with forms so palpable, colouring so vivid.

It holds good of all works produced from the depths of the human soul that we think the work does not give the full measure of the artist. The greatness of the work leads us to imagine the greatness of the artist, and we conceive him as rising above it. High as his achievement

may have been, his design, or at least his aim, was still higher. Much of what the artist has seen and felt is lost on its arduous passage through the material at his command—becomes, as it were, entangled in it. This is true of the poet, too, who for his representations has to make use of the most volatile, the most spiritual, of all substances — language. This is true, too, of Shakespeare. We conceive the poet Shakespeare greater than what he has created. But he was fortunate beyond many others in that he could express so great a part of what he felt in a form so entirely conformable to his nature—the dramatic form. None of our great poets was so wholly possessed by the genius of the drama as Shakespeare. It is impossible to conceive of him as other than a dramatist.

The loss would be irreparable were we to be deprived of the sonnets, those little masterpieces of art, like chiselled marble, so clear cut, so delicately wrought,

breathing such glowing life. But even the sonnets recall the dramatic poet, not only because taken in connection they are related to a real and most moving drama, but because at many points the poem in its stormy course and its daring use of metaphors betrays real dramatic intensity.

But the dramatist appears much more clearly in his epic attempts, in "Venus and Adonis" and in "Lucrece," not to the advantage of the effect produced by these poems. The very thing that constitutes the greatest strength of the poet here appears as a weakness. The abundance, the clearness, the intensity, of his conceptions prove an injury to him here, because the means to which he is accustomed are not here at his disposal. The stage he knows intimately; he comes into daily and closest contact with his audience; he knows what will produce an effect upon the stage, and what kind of an effect; all its artifices are at his command.

If he wishes to represent a character, a situation, he has the greatest variety of means at his disposal, besides the speech, the play of features, and the gestures of the actors, to whom he need but give hints. Here, furthermore, the meaning of everything is brought out by its accompaniments—the cause by the effect it produces, the character of a man by the impression he makes upon others, the speech by its answer. Shakespeare has all the resources of theatrical illusion in his mind when writing his dramas, and he has complete command of them. In epic poetry he must renounce the methods so familiar to him. He knows this; he knows that it is his words alone which must produce the effect upon the senses; he thinks, therefore, that he must give more than mere allusions if he wants to make his readers see things as he sees them—and he always sees them vividly, bodily, before him. He endeavours to express everything, and the consequence is

that we have an overwhelming abundance of details which do not combine to give us a comprehensive view of the whole; it is poetry which, in spite of the wonderful beauty of its lavishly scattered details, as a whole leaves us unmoved.

Nothing of epic delight in these poems; everywhere the most intense tension, keeping the reader in almost breathless suspense. Full of passionate sympathy for his subject, the poet endeavours to exploit all the elements of it, to illuminate them on every side; everywhere we wish the action to proceed, and we feel it retarded. And there is, besides, the true dramatic striving to attribute a symbolic significance to every part of the action, to spiritualize every material detail. We find this illustrated in the description of Tarquin's passage in the night from his own chamber to that of the heroine: how he forces open the locks of the doors through which he must pass, and how at this every lock cries out indignantly; how

the door creaks on its hinges to betray him; how the weasels prowling about at night frighten him with their screeching; how the wind, penetrating through the cracks and crannies, wages war with the torch he holds in his hand, blowing the smoke into his face, and extinguishing the light; but how he rekindles it with the breath hot from his burning heart. All this is conceived in a dramatic, by no means in an epic, sense.

But here arises the question: How can it be accounted for that Shakespeare, so normal, healthy, and simple a nature, is gifted so exclusively for the drama, not at all for epic poetry, while it is precisely epic poetry that flourishes in ages characterized by a simple, healthy spirit? Let us pause a moment at this question.

Real epic poetry proceeds from a joyous love of life, and its effect is to enhance that joy. A thorough optimism characterizes the true epic bard, and he

presupposes his readers to be endowed with the same quality. He calculates mainly upon their impulse to admire great heroic figures, mighty deeds, strange destinies; even where deep sympathy is aroused in the fate of the hero it is grounded upon admiration: an Achilles who dies an early death, a Siegfried who is treacherously murdered. And how characteristic of the ancient Homeridæ that they do not represent at all the death of Achilles, but simply let us feel that it is an event certain before long to take place. To the epic poet almost all that he describes is beautiful and worthy; that which is ugly or contemptible is only introduced for the sake of contrast; and he knows how to idealize even what is ugly and contemptible. He invests the objects and concerns of everyday life with a golden glow which makes them appear attractive and important; every warrior becomes to him upon occasion a hero; the hero rises to a demigod,

nay, at times dares to engage in combat with the gods themselves.

The epic poet is instinct with exuberant life, and he enhances this feeling, and the feeling of joy in existence, in his hearers. Naturally he arouses a longing, too, for a beautiful, vanished age; but it is longing of a kind which childhood, living in a fairy world, experiences—a kind that finds its gratification in the poem itself. This is true of even so tragic an epic as Milton's "Paradise Lost"; here, of course, the representation turns upon the irrevocable loss, but very essentially, too, upon a vivid presentment of what was lost, upon a description of paradise.

How totally different the drama! The dramatist, also, leads us into an ideal world, but never to show it to us in its unclouded purity, always picturing it in a state of conflict and confusion. The drama, too, places heroes before us, but what renders these heroes dramatically effective is not the qualities which make

them heroes, but those which make them men. The dramatic hero is, above all else, a man—that is to say, a combatant.

Conflict is the essential thing in the drama—conflict in all its detail, in its origin and its development; it does not depend for its effect upon the strength and the courage of the victor; on the contrary, those dramatic struggles are the most impressive where the hero is finally vanquished. In the drama we do not want to have our admiration aroused, but to be stirred by a living sympathy; even if it move us to tears of intensest pity, if it convulse the very depths of our being, we want to share, within ourselves, in the hero's struggle, whether it have a happy or an unhappy issue, whether it be followed by the hero's ruin, or only by his punishment or mortification. But to this end we must become most intimately acquainted with the cause and the circumstances of the conflict, as well as with the character of the hero. We must see

the inevitableness of the struggle, how it is evolved through the action and reaction between the character, desires, aims, of the hero, on the one hand, and his environment on the other. We must feel convinced that the hero in a given situation could, to be true to his nature, have acted only as he did, and not otherwise. Only then shall we see ourselves pictured in him, only then put ourselves in his place, identify ourselves with him, suffer with his sorrow and rejoice in his joy; only then, too, will the laughter which he compels be the outburst of a full heart, affording us genuine spiritual relief.

The drama, then, as opposed to the epic, is at once more spiritual and more effective. It allows us to penetrate more deeply into the inner being of the characters; cause and effect are closely linked together; we are more powerfully moved by it to laughter or to tears. These highest effects of the drama are only attain-

able, however, if we actually witness the action; and, on the other hand, if a dramatic performance were presented before us without producing any such effects, it would soon grow wearisome and annoying.

The more ambitious, the more powerful, the artistic means employed to impress the sense, the more powerful should the effect prove. Only an action that really stirs us, and keeps us in vivid suspense, should be dramatically represented. To create this effect there must be a consonance between the matter and the form and between both and the theatrical presentation.

As the epic is the poetry of the youth of mankind, so is the drama the poetry of its manhood. It flourishes in epochs which no longer cherish much faith in the golden age, among men who see life as it is, as a struggle, and who, at the same time, seek strength and refreshment for this struggle in the contemplation of

ideal conflicts which bring before them an image of their own inmost life.

To return to Shakespeare. His early youth passed like an idyl replete with epic joyousness, but without rousing within him the desire to enhance that joyousness artistically. To this simple man the calm life in communion with the nature which surrounded him was sufficient; no models pointed the way toward epic creation; no vision of literary renown passed in alluring colours before his soul. Perfect content needs no artistic utterance; great inner wealth is self-sufficient. Scarce had he entered upon manhood when the idyl drew to its close; his heart was stirred by mighty passions, a tremendous conflict rent his soul, the battle of life had begun for him, and uninterruptedly through the best years of his life, nay, beyond that period, he had to fight this battle in many forms, and was thus ever reminded of the limitations of human nature.

So it fell out that Shakespeare came to London, became acquainted with the stage, where Marlowe's art, then enjoying its first triumphs, took our poet's fancy captive. Need we wonder that Shakespeare became a dramatist, that he developed with a certain exclusiveness into a dramatic artist, since his outward as well as his inward life, since the whole time to which he belonged, impelled him to it?

But it is time that we should observe more accurately how Shakespeare conceived and carried out his art.

It is the task of every art, in every individual instance, to so fashion an object out of a given substance that it will represent an idea or arouse a certain state of feeling. The material, be it stone or bronze, colour or tone or word, determines the manner of representation in one art as distinguished from another, The drama, like all poesy, has language as its material to work in, but it commands,

besides this, the histrionic art. The entire personality of the actors, the whole stage apparatus, form a part of the dramatic artist's material; he is thus not the sole, but only the foremost, the leading artist. Language is the stuff in which he works, but he must picture to himself as he labours the effect which the theatrical presentation of his work is to produce.

The subject of the dramatic poet's work consists in the story or plot. It may be handed down by history, or be based upon some event of the day; it may belong to myth or legend, or be the result of pure invention. In the last case the poet may himself have invented the plot, but this rarely happens; as a rule, the story is handed down to the poet, and it is indeed the greatest poets who trouble themselves least with the invention of a new plot.

The reason of this may be easily comprehended. The story is the substance which the dramatist shapes in accordance

with his own ideas. Shall he, then, first create this substance, and afterward elaborate it to suit his higher purposes? If so, it were much simpler for him to be governed by these purposes in inventing his plot; that is, to take an idea which he wishes to convey as a starting point, and seek a concrete embodiment of that idea. Many dramas are formed on this principle,—the modern French stage might offer us numerous examples,—and such dramas may be very effective. Yet, as a rule, there is something artificial about them; they are apt to create an impression, fatal to the success of any poetic production, of something forced. It appears too evident that the whole thing is conceived merely to illustrate an idea, that the action takes place only to prove some abstract proposition—and the consequence is that it is our intelligence alone that is concerned, our hearts remain cold; we may be pleasantly animated, perhaps excited, but we are not thrilled by it.

The normal course is that some occurrence—in life, in history, in conversation—or the substance of some tale, has so powerfully wrought upon the poet that it has stirred the creative vein within him.

And so it was in the case of Shakespeare. Rarely, perhaps never, did he invent his plot for himself, different as the extent and the significance of what he owes to his sources may be. He shows himself most independent, perhaps, in "Love's Labour's Lost," where, although we can prove certain motives and situations to be reminiscences of older works, we can nowhere find a model for the groundwork of the action as a whole. Yet who knows but that life itself offered what literature has so far not disclosed to us? As a rule, we are able to authenticate his sources, be they histories, novels, or dramas; and a comparative study teaches us with what freedom, with what entire absence of timidity,

he drew from those sources. Shakespeare has been called the great adapter, and with justice; but he who thinks that by this designation he can rob him of even the smallest leaf of his laurel crown knows not what poetic originality signifies in the history of literature. "*Je prends mon bien où je le trouve,*" said Molière, and this is the maxim that all great conquerors in the realm of the mind have followed. The essential question is not how much one has appropriated, but what he makes of the thing he appropriates. And who, indeed, could urge grounds of complaint against Shakespeare's proceeding? The authors whom he has made use of? But did they not themselves likewise, nay, still more comprehensively, make use of their predecessors? And then—do not most of them owe their immortality solely to Shakespeare? Who would now read their writings were it not on account of Shakespeare?

The dramatist, then, must shape the

story handed down to him into dramatic action. In this he is governed by the ideas which possess his soul, often without his full consciousness, as a vague impulse, a compelling force. How does Shakespeare proceed to mould the story into dramatic action? Regarded on the surface, we observe the greatest variety in his methods, and in vain should one labour to extract from a study of his dramas any sort of prescription for the benefit of incipient dramatists. Now we see Shakespeare following his sources as closely as possible, deviating only in details, apparently in matters of no significance, and again we find him transforming the story in its most essential points; now endeavouring to simplify the story, and again complicating it by combining it with other tales and other motives. Already in one of his first dramas—"A Comedy of Errors"—the poet makes use of no less than four different sources in order to produce a most highly involved

and yet readily comprehended action; in his next comedy the action is as simple as possible, one might almost say inadequate.—What is it, then, that is common to methods differing so widely from each other, that is characteristic of them all? One might say: Shakespeare always condenses the dramatic action, draws it together more closely, in order to bring out forcibly the chief elements of the play, and glides lightly over the mere connecting links. True as this may be, yet in view of the fact that he frequently amplifies the main plot, interweaves it with others, or introduces some episode into the action, the truth of the remark would hardly be evident. One might, on the other hand, say: Shakespeare is always intent upon joining the members of the action in closer union by strengthening the motive, laying greater stress upon the relation between cause and effect, impressing upon the whole development of the piece the stamp of necessity. This

might also be very true; yet here, too, individual instances can be cited in apparent contradiction to that proposition. We find that Shakespeare's plots, particularly toward the close of his dramas, are occasionally somewhat loosely constructed. Or how else should we term it when, in "As You Like It," the usurper Frederick, who has driven his brother, the good duke, from the throne, toward the end of the drama, as we are told (for we see none of it), surrounds the wood where the latter abides with his army, intending to seize and kill him; there he meets with an old monk or hermit, who after some talk converts him, so that he not only abandons his purpose, but retires from the world and restores to his brother the crown of which he had robbed him. Here Shakespeare has, indeed, been easy-going in the matter of motive.

Did we wish to characterize Shakespeare's method in a manner that should fitly apply to all cases, we should have to

make prominent, above all, the unfailingness with which he seizes the gist of his plot, and develops the whole from that point; the mastery with which he so organizes it that, starting with very simple premises, all seems to follow with the inevitableness of nature's laws; that we are prepared in advance for every incident, and that it, in its turn, prepares us for what is to follow, all the wheels working into each other; every feature, even the most insignificant, contributes to the development of the whole. All this, however, is only to say that Shakespeare is unapproached in the dramatic conception of a given material, in the genius with which he moulds the story in accordance with his ideas.

Everything, therefore, depends upon the idea which fills the poet's mind or which is aroused by the story. What, then, are we to understand by this idea in Shakespeare? German æsthetics laboured many years to prove that there is

in every Shakespearean drama a so-called fundamental idea concealed behind the action. Particularly in those plays where the action is a complicated one, not easily to be grasped as a unity, did they seek with all the more ardour for a unity of idea. By this they understood, as a rule, some general proposition, or, at any rate, an abstract formula: for instance, the relation of man to possession; or the necessity of guarding against extremes in passion—for instance, in love; or the inquiry as to the just balance between reflection and action. Wearied by the multitude of artificial deductions by means of which they arrived at such often very trivial results, they have, indeed, more recently gone over to the other extreme, "throwing out the child along with the bath." Many deny the necessity of a unity of idea for the drama, and the existence of such an idea has, in "Twelfth Night," for example, been even lately disputed.

It all depends upon what is understood by the dramatic idea.

In reality, this means nothing but the point of view from which the poet regards the plot. This point of view must be unitary, yet we often feel the resulting unity of action without distinctly recognizing it. We are not always able to trace it back to a general proposition.

Yet it were perhaps better to abandon the field of abstractions, and make our meaning clearer by taking a concrete example. For this purpose let us select a drama which is familiar to you all—one, besides, where, regarded purely on the surface, the dramatist owes apparently almost everything to the source from which he drew: "Romeo and Juliet." Gustav Freytag has, in his "Technology of the Drama," compared in a very attractive manner the action in this tragedy with the story upon which it is founded; yet his presentation contains some errors, which are to be mainly

attributed to his lack of acquaintance, or at least to his insufficient acquaintance, with the actual source of the drama. The distinction between the mere action of the play and the story which the poet made use of is not nearly as great as Freytag points out; the difference, however, between the tragedy and the tale upon which it is based is none the less great; but this difference does not lie alone, nor even chiefly, in the construction of the plot, but in the treatment of the characters, in the dramatic structure, in the aptness of the language for the stage—in short, in the execution in its most comprehensive sense. The play will, on that account, serve best to teach us how all these elements are related to each other.

The sources of the Romeo and Juliet legend are, as is well known, Italian. Shakespeare, however, became acquainted with it through two English adaptations, both of which can be traced back through

a French medium to the Italian original: the prose presentation by William Paynter, which appeared in the year 1567, and especially the versified tale of Arthur Brooke, which was printed as early as 1562. Paynter's prose is essentially a close reproduction of his French model, whereas we find a considerable development in Brooke's poetical version, the details variously modified and enriched. Notwithstanding its somewhat Old Frankish tone, this poem evinces genuine feeling and pronounced talent; that Shakespeare made it the groundwork of his drama is its highest acknowledgment.

Shakespeare found his material in Brooke's poem, by no means in a raw state, but in a very advanced stage—not only the chief characters, but nearly all the minor ones, all the more important and a great number of subordinate motives, the plan of entire scenes, the ideas of numerous passages. What remained, then, for the poet to do, and

what was his share of the work? Well, Shakespeare has created an irresistibly fascinating, thrilling tragedy out of an interesting, touching romance, a work of art of imperishable worth out of a poem of ephemeral value. This, I think, were enough. But how has he done it?

He who would give a categorical, objective account of the contents of Shakespeare's tragedy, on the one hand, and of Brooke's versified romance, on the other, would present two tales which deviate very little from each other, nay, which superficial readers would regard as exactly identical. But what a difference in their way of looking at the story, in the idea which each conceives of his subject! Both Shakespeare and Brooke have taken the trouble to intimate briefly in a sonnet the substance of their poems. It is instructive to compare the two sonnets with each other.

This is how Brooke conceives his subject: Love has enkindled two hearts at

first sight, and they accomplish their desires. They are secretly united by a monk, and enjoy for a time the highest bliss. Inflamed to fury by Tybalt's wrath, Romeo kills him and is obliged to flee into banishment. Juliet is to be forced into another marriage; to escape this she takes a draught which has the effect of making her appear as if dead; while in this sleep she is buried alive. Her husband receives information of her death, and takes poison. And she, when she awakes, kills herself with Romeo's dagger. This is all; not a word about the feud between the two houses of Verona, the Montagues and Capulets; although the poem makes mention of all these things, they are evidently of no real interest to the poet; he perceives no deeper connection between the family feud and the fate of his main characters. It is a touching love story to him, and nothing more.

And Shakespeare? I will not translate here the familiar sonnet which precedes

the tragedy. But this is his idea of the story: Two young beings endowed by Nature with her most charming gifts, created as if for each other, glow with the purest, most ardent love. But fate has placed them in a rude, hostile world; their passion blossoms and grows in the midst of the most inflamed party and family hatred. A peaceful development, one that would lead to a happy consummation, is here impossible. Completely possessed by their love, they forget the hate which divides their families, enjoy for a few brief moments a happiness which transports them to the summit of human experience. Then they are torn asunder by the hostile powers. A last flickering of hope, a daring attempt to lead the Fates in accordance with their desires, and immediately thereafter the fatal error which plunges them in the cold embrace of death. But in death they are lastingly united, their burning longing is now stilled forever; and as

they themselves have found peace, so does their blood quench the flames of the hatred which has disunited their families. Over their lifeless bodies the fathers join their hands in a brotherly grasp, and their monument becomes a symbol of the love that conquered hate.

This is the way that Shakespeare regarded his subject; this, the idea he sought to impress upon his material; from this conception sprang all the deviations from his model, sprang the entire structure of the tragedy.

Shakespeare's object is to arouse the deepest sympathy, the most heartfelt pity, for his lovers, to thrill us with their tragic destiny, but at the same time to lift us to a point whence we can feel a reconciling element even in this cruel fate.

All that can serve this double purpose is brought into play, all opposing elements are discarded.

Let us consider a few details. In Brooke's narrative the action extends

over a greater period of time, over several months; Shakespeare has concentrated it into a few days. Why this change? It was not the arrangements or the usages of his stage which determined him to it. In these respects, on the contrary, Shakespeare exercised the utmost freedom. He was guided solely by his sure dramatic instinct. For how was that long space of time in the narrative filled up? Three months does Brooke allow the secretly united pair to enjoy their happiness in peace. Then only does the event occur which parts them. Who does not feel that the delicate bloom which clings to Shakespeare's characters would be at once dispelled by the admixture of this feature? Who does not feel that the infinite pathos of their fate, as well, would sink to an everyday level? Besides, if they could be secretly happy for three months, why does not their happiness last longer? It is mere chance which brings it to an end. How different with

Shakespeare! These two glorious creatures are made for each other; but the world, the Fates, do not will them to be united. And not for a moment does the poet leave us in uncertainty about their tragic destiny. They may enjoy their love but a few short hours, and that only when their fate is already sealed, when Tybalt is dead and Romeo banished. Not for a moment the feeling of undisturbed possession, and upon this brief joy follows at once the eternal parting. This is poetry, this is tragedy. You see how infinitely much depends upon this one little deviation in regard to time. And still more depends on it. This concentration of the action is in most perfect keeping with the condensed structure of this dramatic gem.

This quicker tempo at the same time attunes us to the heated atmosphere which breathes in this tragedy, to the sudden kindling, the rapid development, of glowing love, the rude outburst of wild

hatred. The striking truth to nature of the tone and colouring of "Romeo and Juliet" has long been commented upon. One is everywhere reminded that the action takes place under an Italian sky. Neither does the poet neglect to bring clearly before us the season in which the tragedy develops, although some critics have been mistaken about it. It was in the hot summer days:

"I pray thee, good Mercutio, let's retire;
The day is hot, the Capulets abroad,
And if we meet, we shall not scape a brawl;
For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring."

The dawn follows close upon the twilight. In the scenes between the two lovers we seem to breathe the air of the brief Italian night.

Over this scene Shakespeare has spread all the witchery of his art, infused it with all the ardour of his young and loving heart. Only three times does the poet represent Romeo and Juliet to-

gether, living, and in a fully developed scene: first, the decisive meeting at the ball; then the balcony scene immediately following it; finally, the farewell of the young pair after their first and last night of love. Nothing more touching or beautiful has ever been written. The climax, however, is perhaps reached in the balcony scene. The fact alone that here lay the most dangerous rock in the path makes it pre-eminent, for there is nothing more difficult and dangerous for the dramatist than the attempt to rival the musician and the lyric poet, to which such extremely simple situations invite him. Other great poets,—and Shakespeare as well, on certain occasions,—have recourse to this or that artifice: they allow the dialogue to be interrupted once or even oftener,—I may remind you of the celebrated garden scene in Goethe's "Faust,"—they intimate more than they represent, allow the largest and best part to be divined, while some attractive,

childish byplay lends animation to the scene. The lovers do not entertain each other with speaking of their emotions; they relate incidents of their past, talk of their everyday life. There is nothing of all this in "Romeo and Juliet." With a genuine scorn of death Shakespeare launches the ship of his fancy, with all sails set, upon the high sea of emotion, regardless of the perils which threaten its course, but which cannot harm it. At such points we ought to compare Brooke's poem with the drama. In the poem Juliet sees Romeo first, then he her; both are elated with joy, yet she the most; then she thinks of the danger hovering over him, and begins to speak amid her tears. In Shakespeare Romeo beholds Juliet appear at the window, and listens, unseen by her, to her monologue. When he has thus learned her tender secret, he discovers himself to her.

Admirable, too, is the art with which Shakespeare shows how the character of

his lovers is developed in and through their love. Admirable, yet not astonishing! For the conception of his characters is with him indissolubly united with his conception of the dramatic action. Therein lies his greatness: that just as he regards all things in their connection, so does he create them in their connection. The psychological depth and truth of his characters, the fulness of life they breathe, the consistency of their development, the necessity with which their actions follow from their nature and position, are universally marvelled at; but the greatest wonder, after all, is how these characters in their gradations, in the way they complement, and, by their contrast, stand out in bold relief against each other, are so totally controlled by the idea of the action. Let us observe Romeo and Juliet—what they were before their love, and what love makes of them.

The greatest transformation takes place in Romeo. A youth with noble senti-

ments, fine culture, keen powers of observation, and ready wit, he seems at the beginning of the play to be pining away from a superabundance of emotion and fancy. The world that surrounds him is too rough and too sober for him. He isolates himself from it entirely, beholds it only as through a veil, and adapts himself more and more to his inner world—a world of dreams, of imaginary joys and sorrows. The poet has retained from Brooke's poem Romeo's sentimental, unrequited love for Rosaline, without presenting Rosaline herself. Her personality is of no concern to us—it might be she or another. Her image is only meant to fill a void in Romeo's inner world; she is merely the object toward which Romeo's deep longing first turns until the proper object appears. From the moment when he beholds Juliet a transformation takes place within him. He is still the youthful dreamer, the poet, that he was, but he begins to act. The con-

sciousness that his love is returned restores him to himself and to the world. His changed being at once strikes his friend: "Why, is not this better than groaning for love? Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo; now art thou what thou art by art as well as by nature." When he is hurled from the heaven of bliss into the wretchedness of banishment, he loses all self-control, breaks out into unmeasured lamentations, into impotent rage against fate. Hope once more revives him. Then, when he finally learns that all is at an end, his decision is at once taken; all gone is his youthful loquacity; happiness and misfortune have completed his education: he has become a man.

In Shakespeare, Juliet is a girl of fourteen, two years younger than in his model. She is for that reason so much more touching a figure: a child who through a great, pure love becomes a woman. She, too, stands isolated in the

world, yet not, like Romeo, because she is by nature a dreamer. She is at first quite unconscious of her position; it is only her experiences after she has met Romeo that reveal to her how foreign to her her parents and surroundings really are. Her nature is simpler, but stronger, her love much more unselfish, than Romeo's. Completely possessed by one idea, she at once comes to a decision, is intent upon practical action. The strength of her love overcomes maidenly shyness, womanly timidity, and allows her to look death in the face. The unfolding of her character in the course of the soliloquy before she takes the sleeping potion is significant. In that nightly hour, on the threshold of the decisive moment, horrid visions rise up before her. Finally she fancies she beholds the awful form of the murdered Tybalt. We find this feature also in Brooke's poem. But there Juliet finally hastily drinks down the contents of the vial, lest fear, after longer re-

flection, should deter her. Shakespeare's Juliet beholds her Romeo threatened by Tybalt, and swiftly seizes the only means of sharing his danger:

"Romeo, I come! this do I drink to thee."

Regarding the characters which group themselves partly about the hero and partly about the heroine, I shall speak but briefly. Excellently drawn is the figure of the old, hasty, passionate Capulet. His wife, very much younger than himself, appeals very feebly to our sympathies; her relations to her husband are in the main of a superficial nature, and even to her child she is bound only by the ties of blood, not by any soulful or spiritual union. And then the nurse, a type of the vulgar, garrulous female, her individuality brought out with masterly realism, and, in spite of Goethe's well-known dictum, an indispensable figure to the drama, serving as a foil to the character of Juliet, as well as to make us

comprehend her total isolation in her parents' house.

Romeo's parents, as befits the story, remain more in the background. On the other hand, we become acquainted with his friends: the calm, moderate Benvolio; the light-hearted, good-natured, impudent, witty Mercutio. This last figure is altogether Shakespeare's creation; in Brooke's poem he is introduced only once, and then merely by allusion. Mercutio,—an image of the exuberance of virile youth in the plenitude of its strength; a humourist who enjoys life and is, at the same time, a shrewd observer,—throws a bright radiance over the first half of the drama. His figure is of the greatest significance, not only in so much as it elucidates Romeo's character, but also on account of the manner in which Shakespeare involves him in the drama of the family feud.

To this side of his subject, to the tragedy of hate, Shakespeare has devoted

scarcely less care than to the tragedy of love, which, indeed, only becomes a tragedy through the other. Shakespeare does not content himself with presenting to our minds the tragic end of his lovers as a motive, strong as this motive, furnished by the story, was. He is intent from the first upon working upon our feelings, prepares us at the outset for the tragic result, knows how to produce in us by a thousand artifices the impression that this thing cannot now or ever reach a happy consummation. Everything must serve this purpose: the character of his lovers, Juliet's youth, her complete isolation, her ignorance of the world, the fatal rapidity with which her love is developed, the dark presentiments which, at the decisive moment, arise in her soul. But this end is served above all by the family feud, so vividly presented to our view; and here we see the art with which Shakespeare constructs his drama, brings his various motives before us. Already

in the first scene we are initiated into these relations. From insignificant, nay, ridiculous beginnings a serious, violent quarrel is evolved. Only the interposition of the prince, who asserts his authority in the most energetic manner, is sufficient to ward off extremes. And already in the first scene Shakespeare introduces Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, the wild, turbulent youth, who embodies most intensely the family hatred. In the ball scene Tybalt is again present, outraged at Romeo's audacity, restrained only with difficulty by his old uncle, and giving vent to the wrath which he is now prevented from satisfying in vows of vengeance:

"But this intrusion shall
Now seeming sweet convert to bitter gall."

Shakespeare's source introduces Tybalt for the first time in the decisive scene, and in a manner totally different, though reminding one, indeed, of the scene in the first act. A street fight has arisen, Tybalt

is among the crowd; Romeo appears upon the scene, tries, like Benvolio in Shakespeare's first act, to separate the combatants. Then Tybalt suddenly attacks Romeo himself, forces him to defend himself, and in thus defending his life to kill him. In Shakespeare the development is an entirely different one, much more significant and tragic. Tybalt seeks out Romeo, challenges him to combat. Romeo refuses to fight with Juliet's cousin. All that is near to her is dear to him. Astounded and enraged at the gentle words with which his friend addresses the brawling fellow, Mercutio then asks Tybalt to walk away with him. Romeo again comes forward when the fight is at its hottest, throws himself between the two combatants, and thus becomes the innocent cause of Mercutio's death. The end of the sturdy humourist is worthy of his life: "Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man. I am peppered, I warrant, for this

world. A plague o' both your houses! 'Zounds, a dog, a rat, a mouse, a cat, to scratch a man to death! a braggart, a rogue, a villain, that fights by the book of arithmetic! Why the devil came you between us? I was hurt under your arm." "I thought all for the best," replies Romeo. With Mercutio the cheerful glow of the zest of life vanishes from the drama; the approaching night heralds its advent. The result has turned Romeo's good intentions into a calamity. His friend is killed for his sake, through his fault. It is his to avenge his death—not by accident, in the stress of self-defence, as Brooke has it, but consciously, from a feeling of duty, must he draw his sword against Juliet's cousin, and strike him down. He gives expression to his feelings after the deed is accomplished as he exclaims: "Oh, I am fortune's fool!" With his own hand, because he could do no otherwise, Romeo gives his dream of love its death blow. Again, as in the

first scene of the play, the prince appears, then restraining and threatening, now punishing. The innocent ones, the lovers, fall a sacrifice to justice; Romeo is banished. When the prince appears the third time, the tragedy is closed. The sacrifices which love demanded have appeased the old hatred also; the prince stands there a woful, sympathetic looker-on, a witness of the peace concluded over the open grave.

FOURTH LECTURE

SHAKESPEARE AS COMIC POET

SHAKESPEARE AS COMIC POET.

THE first collected edition of Shakespeare's plays, the folio of the year 1623, is divided into three parts, and contains, as well as was then possible, all the material. First come the *Comedies*, then the *Histories*, and lastly the *Tragedies*. Later editors and commentators have often preferred a different division: Comedies, Tragedies, and Dramas [*Schauspiele*],* and the latter classification is familiar to us. Now what relation does this modern arrangement bear to the old one? Does what we term drama coincide with the historical or chronicle play? or, if this be not the case, what is the reason that in Shakespeare's time they found no

* There is no exact English equivalent for *Schauspiel*, which denotes something between tragedy and comedy.

necessity of placing the drama in a different category from comedy and tragedy? and how is it that we, on the other hand, no longer recognize the "history" as a subdivision of the drama? The last question is easily disposed of.

The history is primarily so called only on account of the nature of its subject-matter. By the term *history* or *chronicle play* is understood a drama whose action is taken from English history. The history of a foreign people, for instance, the Roman, was not classed under that head; "Julius Cæsar," "Coriolanus," "Antony and Cleopatra," are accounted as tragedies. Neither does old Scottish history, nor the accounts, so rich in fable, of the old British kings, furnish material for the histories: neither "Macbeth," nor, on the other hand, "Lear" or "Cymbeline," belongs to the chronicle plays. It is, then, English history alone, in its narrower signification, that is understood; in reality, only such periods of that history as were

not too far removed from that time; periods, finally, about which they possessed abundant sources of information, and which were vividly brought before Shakespeare's contemporaries by various representations of a popular character.

Among no other nation at that time was the knowledge of their own past so generally diffused, so incorporated into their very blood, so actively effective, as among the English. And with one great period of this past the Elizabethan age was pre-eminently familiar. It is the period which separates the Anglo-Norman era from the era of the Tudors, the time in which modern England, as regards its speech, its manners, its constitution, was being evolved in ever more definite outlines: the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. The Elizabethan epic drew its subjects chiefly from this period; it likewise furnished the material of the historical dramas. Almost all of Shakespeare's historical pieces,

too, play in this epoch, and notably in the fifteenth century; only in his "Henry VIII." does he finally venture to portray more recent times.

It is evident that, from the standpoint of the æsthetic critic, there is no justification for the existence of the historical play as a separate species of dramatic composition, much as it may signify from the standpoint of the English patriot and politician. But it is not a question merely of names, of the fitness of the term *history*, and the adoption of a third species to be classed alongside of *tragedy* and *comedy*. In reality, politics and patriotism,—not æsthetics alone,—filled a very important part in the historical dramas of that time, and plays of this kind cannot, for the most part, be judged from the point of view of strict dramatic theory. The necessity of paying altogether unusual regard to the underlying story, the refractory character of that story, the abundance of facts and figures,

the multitude of inevitable premises—all this does not, in many ways, allow the poet that symmetrical working out and transparent combination of motives, that intensifying of characteristics, above all, that concentration of dramatic interest, which theory justly demands of the drama. The king who gives the name to a piece is often not its real hero; in many cases we seek for one in vain, or find, instead of one, two, three, or more, and finally grow conscious that our sympathies are enlisted less in the individuals than in the fate of the personages as a whole, that the unity of the work lies not in the powers of attraction of an individual depicted as the central figure, but in the idea which proceeds from the relations between historical facts.

Among productions of this kind, however, two distinctly different types may be distinguished: a freer and a stricter art form, more or less strongly marked according to the individuality of the poet

and the nature of the material. In the freer form the poet seeks to replace the dramatic advantages which he must dispense with, especially concentration, by other qualities—by the charm produced by the well-ordered abundance of varied events and interesting personages; by the blending of historical *genre* pictures, humourous scenes, with affairs of state. Historical plays constructed on this type exhibit a certain resemblance to the epic. The other form betrays the endeavour, by its condensation of the matter, by the energetic treatment and close interlacing of the chief elements, to approach the strictly dramatic form, —tragedy, in fact,—as closely as possible. In both forms Shakespeare has created unparalleled models; the freer culminates in his "Henry IV." the stricter in his "Richard III." On the whole, however, he favours the freer form, to which the story, as a rule, more readily lends itself.

If we comprehend now why the national historical play constitutes in Shakespeare a class apart, it still remains to be explained why he does not recognize the drama [*Schauspiel*] in general as a separate species, as distinguished from tragedy and comedy. The reasons for this fact will be evident to us when we shall have become acquainted with Shakespeare as a tragic and as a comic poet.

When discussion turns upon the favourites of the comic Muse in modern times, everyone at once thinks of Molière; Shakespeare's name will not so directly occur even to connoisseurs and worshippers. What is the cause of this? May it perhaps be that they are right who assert that Shakespeare does not equal the French poet in comic power? But how can such an opinion be maintained in face of obvious facts? Allow me to recall those facts to your minds.

If we review the different qualities

which constitute a comic poet, and ask whether Shakespeare possessed them, we shall find that he commanded them to as great or even to a greater degree than Molière. Has there ever been one who has so profoundly fathomed the human heart, with its passions, its frailties, its vices? a more subtile observer of every species of peculiarity, whether it spring from the inmost fibres of the heart, or appear merely on the surface? Where has there been in modern times a poet who conceived the ludicrous with such keenness and represented it with so sure a touch? In what dramatist do we find a greater wealth of genuinely comic figures—figures whose mere appearance suffices to put us into the most jovial humour, whose speech and action irresistibly provoke us to laughter? And as for wit and humour, who can deny that Shakespeare's wit, though it may contain far more that is antiquated than Molière's, who presupposed a more fas-

tidious taste and a severer reasoning tendency—who can deny that Shakespeare's wealth is so great that, even after abstracting all lighter and cheaper matter, enough remains to make him dispute Molière's precedence? while Shakespeare's humour in its depths as well as its cheerful glow far surpasses that of the Frenchman. In the art, too, with which he prepares the way for significant situations of highly comic effect he is second to no dramatist. Just recall the scene in "Love's Labour's Lost" where the members of the academy of Navarre, who have all forsworn the love of woman and have all perjured themselves, are in turn unmasked each by another, till finally each one, to his mortification, but, at the same time, to his comfort, becomes conscious that he can cast no reproach at the others nor they at him. The scene is so capitally introduced, and so effectively carried out with such simple means, that it can complacently bear comparison with

any similar scene in Molière—for instance, with the one which leads to the catastrophe in the "Misanthrope." In one point only does the English poet seem decidedly inferior to the French: in the firm handling of the dramatic action, in the unity of structure of the comic drama. If we consider, however, that Shakespeare displays in a most eminent degree in his tragedies precisely those qualities which we sometimes miss in his comedies, it appears to us most improbable that this is a proof of inability. Such an assumption becomes untenable, yes, absurd, when we reflect that Shakespeare's earliest comedies are far more regularly and firmly constructed, are, indeed, in many respects more effective as comedies, than those of his ripest period.

The highly complicated action in "The Comedy of Errors" is managed with such perfect knowledge of the technique of the stage, and with so sure a hand, that the suspense is increased with every scene

and is only removed in the catastrophe. No French drama of intrigue is more effectively constructed than is this, the first effort of Shakespeare's pen. Perfectly true to art, also, is the development of the first four acts of "Love's Labour's Lost," while in the last a certain diminution of suspense is, of course, noticeable. In "The Taming of the Shrew," where he enters into the style of an older author, and confines himself essentially to the reconstruction of the main action, this main action stands out in such powerful relief, and is evolved with such true logical sequence, and with so irresistible an effect, from the characters of the participants, that this play still forms a powerful attraction of the dramatic repertory, though in some respects it was already antiquated in Shakespeare's time. Among the comedies of Shakespeare's maturest period, "The Merry Wives of Windsor" exhibits the most regular structure; but those very comedies which

are richest in substance and in poetic beauty lack the strict unity of a comedy of Molière. In Molière's best works we have either a strongly marked character with some prominent peculiarity or passion, who forms the centre of the action, or this place is taken by some dominant custom, that is to say, some dominant abuse, of the time, to which a number of the personages of the drama pay homage. That character or custom controls the whole action, and nearly all the dramatic effects may in the last instance be traced back to it. In Shakespeare's most important comedies we see two or even three actions artfully interwoven, yet in such a manner that, upon a purely superficial view, the dramatic structure appears in many ways somewhat loose, and is held together chiefly by the poetic idea. But, above all, that which here constitutes the centre of interest is, as a rule, no comic action at all, whether it spring from the faults of a character or the tend-

encies of a time; the principal action, indeed, has generally an earnest, touching, or, it may be, romantic colouring; while the really comic characters and situations figure principally in the subordinate action.

Our reflections, finally, lead us to the following conclusions: If Shakespeare as a comic poet has not found that universal and unqualified acknowledgment which has been accorded to Molière, it is not on account of any deficiency in his powers as a comic writer, but rather because of his too great inner wealth, which leads him to bring into play too great an abundance of motives and situations, which causes him to scatter his wit in too prodigal a fashion and without discrimination; because of a certain joyous light-heartedness and primitive freshness which finds pleasure in the simplest jest, and does not painfully weigh the effect of a witticism; because of the important influence which, pre-eminently in

his comedies, he allows his fancy to exert, while Molière works far more with his understanding; but, above all, because Shakespeare's designs were far less exclusively comic than the Frenchman's. This is connected with a difference between their conceptions of comedy, a point which requires a somewhat closer examination.

Molière's conception of the comic is more nearly allied to our own view of it, as well as to that of the ancients, than is Shakespeare's. The latter, indeed, is also related to the ancient conception, not directly, however, but only through its mediæval development.

The subject-matter of the comic drama is the ludicrous, and this is defined by Aristotle, in his "Poetics," as a kind of defect, as something ugly or bad, which is not, however, associated with anything painful, and which does not prove pernicious. The philosopher, to illustrate this by an example, cites most

happily the comic mask itself, which represented something ugly and distorted, without expressing pain.

But should we submit the best and most celebrated of Molière's comedies to this test, we should find to our astonishment that it is by no means applicable to them. Let us take an unrivalled masterpiece like "L'École des Femmes": Arnolph, the old egoist, who has reared a young girl in utter isolation to absolute inexperience and ignorance with the intention of marrying her, and who must now learn to his dismay that Love has found a way even to his prisoner, and that he proves a consummate teacher even to this being so totally undeveloped; Arnolph, who is kept constantly informed of the progress of this love, and yet is not in a position to check it, whose fine-spun plans end in his own ruin—Arnolph is certainly a capitally comic, a decidedly ridiculous figure. But does that which is faulty, ugly, in

him not prove painful? Arnolph undergoes positive torture, and, much as he may deserve it, the sympathetic reader feels with him. And the misanthrope, that noble, but too frank and heedless, character, who, while believing he hates and despises the world, becomes entangled in the snares of a coquette, from which he finally releases himself at the expense of a deep heart-wound, and then buries himself in solitude—is not painful the fate of this man, of which Goethe says it produces an absolutely tragic effect? And the miser: the fiendish passion which possesses Harpagon, which has killed all that is divine in him, and destroyed every filial emotion in his children—who would regard this passion as not pernicious? And finally Tartuffe, the hypocrite, who undermines the happiness of a whole family, a family that has heaped benefits upon him—is the nature, the conduct, of this man not pernicious?

We see, then, how it is the greatest masterpieces of the comic Muse that transgress the limits of the comic, and if, nevertheless, all these works succeed in creating a comic effect, it is owing to the art of the poet, who knows how to manage it so that the spectator does not become too vividly conscious of the painful and hurtful side of the ridiculous material presented to him. It seems clear to us that the question whether a certain failing or a certain evil appears ludicrous, depends not only upon the kind and degree of the evil and the extent of its influence, but very essentially upon the standpoint of those who happen to be the spectators at the time.

Upon this rests the development which took place in the conception of the comic in the Middle Ages, and which, in spite of its apparent *naïveté*, conceals a great deal of depth. What can there be more childish and uncultured than the idea that a tragedy is a play in which the

people become unhappy and die? a comedy, one that has a happy termination? And yet but little need be added to bridge the way to the profoundest conception. The tragic conflict is of such a nature that it must have a bad ending; the comic, of a kind that can end happily and consequently should. By reflecting upon this definition we might easily arrive at a complete theory of both classes of plays. Likewise, if we examine the naïve definition in Dante's letter to Can Grande, or in the "Catholicon" of Giovanni Balbi of Genoa. According to them comedy is distinguished from tragedy in that a tragedy is great and calm at the beginning, but at the end grows horrible and ghastly; while a comedy allows the beginning of the action to be painful in order to lead it to a happy conclusion.

This view has been scoffed at a hundred times, yet only by superficial critics. Let us try to look into the matter a little

more thoroughly. Is not the tragic fate the more tragic the greater the height of bliss from which the hero is hurled? and —to go deeper—is not the effect of the tragedy greatest in those cases where the error which finally causes the hero's ruin appears at first perfectly harmless, particularly if the fatal error he commits be linked with his inmost nature, his noblest qualities? And comedy—is it not then most effective when the evil which it brings before us is most agitating, and is, nevertheless, happily overcome in an easy, natural way? It is this that is really characteristic of the mediæval conception of the comic. The harmlessness, the immunity from pain, of the ugly and the bad which are presented on the scene are based upon the fact that the evil is conquered in the course of the action. The development leads the participants in the action as well as the audience up to a higher plane, to a height whence they behold the vicious

and the ugly far beneath them and penetrate their hollowness, whence the evil veritably appears like an abandoned standpoint, and in so far like something ridiculous. This conception, in its profoundest sense, is embodied in the grandest comedy of all time—in Dante's Divine Comedy. As Dante urges his painful upward way through hell and purgatory to paradise, and here through all the heavenly spheres to a vision of the uncreated, he learns to regard divine justice, which at first appears to him as the vengeance of the Almighty, upon a higher plane, as a manifestation of the All-wise intent upon the bettering of mankind, until finally he recognizes infinite love as its real essence—the love which moves sun and stars.

This, of course, is not a comedy in the ancient sense, and just as little in ours. A play animated by such an idea would much rather realize our ideal of the drama [*Schauspiel*]. But this apprehen-

sion of comedy is closely related to that of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare sees that in the world good and evil, the sublime and ridiculous, joy and sorrow, stand close together, jostle each other, nay, are entwined with each other. The most innocent thing may prove noxious, and that which is pernicious be changed to good. Upon laughter follows weeping; upon weeping, laughter; the very occurrence, indeed, which draws tears from one may provoke another to mirth; according to the standpoint of the observer will an action or a situation appear pathetic or laughable; and even one and the same person may weep tears of laughter or smile amid tears.

Acting upon this comprehensive perception of the world around him, Shakespeare creates the world of his dramas. This is why he likes to interweave comic figures and motives into his tragic action, and why, conversely, he generally gives a

serious background to his comic actions, or allows a graver note to be heard through the noisy outbursts of uncontrolled merriment. This is why his characters, like those of real life, do not appear simple, but complex, a compound of good and evil, of strength and weakness. None of the types, so easily interpreted, of the ancient or even of the classic French stage are to be found among Shakespeare's great tragic figures; but his comic characters, also, are, as a rule, richer, endowed with more individual traits, than those that owe their origin to the genius of Molière.

If in all this we have a high degree of realism, we find in closest union with this realism the ideality which characterizes Shakespeare's art. And to the poet's ideal conception of the world there is added a decidedly optimistic quality—a quality which, appearing now in a weaker, now in a stronger, form, and for a while disappearing altogether, still, in the end,

proves itself indestructible. Shakespeare believes in the beautiful and the good, he believes that they are realized in the souls of men; he believes in the value of this world and of this life. He has preserved his faith, even though not without hard struggles, even though not unshaken, in the eventual triumph of the good in the development of the destinies of the world. This optimism is not absent from Shakespeare's historical dramas, or even his tragedies, but it appears above all in his comedies. They are, as it were, moments of relaxation in which he indulges his inward tendency to optimism and trustful faith. He deals largely with such human conflicts, such human errors, as are capable of the most disastrous, the most fatal consequences, but which, through a happy chain of events, are led to a favourable issue. One cannot always see in this fortunate turn of affairs a logical sequence of the actions of the characters concerned; the heroes in

Shakespeare's comedies are often rendered happy beyond their deserts, let us say, without their own efforts—and where does this not occur upon the stage, where does it not occur in the world? This, then, were chance; but can the poet content himself with bare chance? Where the poet cannot see, he can at least dimly feel. Let us observe what terms he makes with chance in one of his earliest comedies, "The Comedy of Errors."

Shakespeare took the underlying motive of this play from the "Menæchmi" of Plautus.

The dramatic interest of the Roman comedy is centred, as is well known, in the consequences ensuing from the perfect resemblance in face and form and the identity of name of the heroes, twin brothers, who, by a strange destiny, are parted from each other at a tender age; one seeks the other half the world over, and, arrived at last at the place where his brother lives, without the remotest

suspicion of it, he is mistaken for his brother by the latter's fellow-citizens and closest relations, even by his own slave. From this result apparent contradictions of the most delightful kind, strange complications, from which the brother residing in the place where the action occurs suffers most particularly, until through the personal meeting of the twins the confusion is suddenly cleared up. The improbable in the premises of the story could not be discarded without destroying the story itself.

And Shakespeare made no attempt to do so. On the contrary, since he accepts a world in which chance rules as the necessary groundwork of his play, he endeavours, with his own peculiar consistency, to extend the realm of chance; he gives it opportunity to assert itself not only in one but in many instances. To the one pair of twins he opposes another, in whom the fate of the first is repeated; to the two masters, so closely

similar as to be mistaken for each other, two servants equally similar. Each Antipholus,—he has thus rechristened the Menæchmi,—has a Dromio for a follower. The story, mad as it was, becomes still madder; the complication grows comic to the highest degree. But the spectator becomes familiar meanwhile with the workings of chance, conceives, unconsciously, a certain respect for this mysterious power which displays such methods. The idea of putting the two pairs of twins in opposition was evoked in Shakespeare's mind, as was pointed out a few years ago, by another comedy of Plautus, the "Amphitruo," from which he borrowed, notably, a very effective scene.

This is not yet all. The repulsive moral relations disclosed to us by Plautus' Menæchmi were modified by Shakespeare with a delicate touch, in part entirely transformed, while, at the same time, he introduced a new element, a love episode, still somewhat shyly

treated, but with a charming lyric colouring. But even this did not satisfy the poet. Before his soul floated a vision of the world more richly and profoundly conceived than that produced by this blending of two fables of Plautus. By weaving into the action the figures and fortunes of the parents of the two brothers Antipholus, old Ægeon and Æmelia, he gained for his play, so full of strange adventures, a setting which is romantic, fairylike, yet charged with deep meaning. It gives us at the opening of the play a glimpse of a fateful past and a threatening future, while, at the same time, it explains the plot of the comedy directly connected with it; but to the close of the drama, mingling itself with the main plot, it imparts a higher spiritual meaning. While the lighter and graver misconceptions, the entanglements, the grievances, of the different personages resolve themselves into the most delightful harmony; while the grief of longing

is stilled, hopes long abandoned realized, and blessings showered upon one to whom but a moment before the grave seemed the only desirable goal—a feeling takes possession of us which makes us apprehend beyond the mysterious play of what we termed chance the ruling of a higher power.

To this apprehension Shakespeare has given different expression at different times. For this purpose here in the first production of his comic muse it pleases him to make use of the childishly naïve form of the fairy-tale. But at the close of his career he recurs to this form, to employ it in a far more daring manner. In "Pericles," in "The Winter's Tale," in "Cymbeline," which has only by accident been classed among Shakespeare's tragedies, the gods clearly, and partly visibly, interfere in the action. In "The Tempest," however, we find Prospero, who, by the power of the human soul, has become the ruler of the spirit world, and

who most truly embodies Shakespeare's wisdom, his magic power, his charity. Something of the character of a fairy-tale is present, though in an entirely different form, even in the most brilliant comedies of his middle period. They reproduce, in their way, dreams of a golden age.

While most other poets regard comedy as the form of drama which should most of all be a faithful mirror of the actual life around them, even as to its background and details, Shakespeare places his scenes among ideally conceived surroundings,—under beautiful, radiant skies, in fresh, green woods, on the shores of the sea,—among surroundings which powerfully stir the imagination and offer free scope to the fantastic play of chance, opportunity for surprising encounters, momentous experiences, sudden changes of fortune. The dramatic action is, as a rule, a complicated one; not rarely chance is permitted to assume a greater rôle than in tragedy. The world presented to our

eyes follows the same laws as the one in which we live. But it is a world of sunshine, seen in happy days on its brightest side—a world which allows us to feel the workings of a benign Providence more clearly than in the reality about us. The beings that live and move in this world are creatures of flesh and blood, with the same inclinations, passions, weaknesses, peculiarities, as the men around us. But passion does not rise to a tragic height; the sinful, the vicious, do not succeed in attaining their end; good deeds are rewarded with a more than customarily lavish hand; punishment is meted out with more charity, often in great part remitted. In many instances sin is expiated by repentance. Everything is so planned that good shall conquer evil, that the plot may culminate happily. Sometimes —whether because of the unmanageableness of the material, or because the poet's fancy first penetrates too deep, then swiftly speeds on in its winged flight—it

happens that the consummation does not seem to us sufficiently warranted, that, indeed, in dramas of his earliest and his latest period he to some degree violates our sense of poetic justice.

We feel this especially in a work not usually put in the class of pure comedy, but which, nevertheless, Shakespeare conceived as one—in "The Merchant of Venice." Here this feeling is closely connected with the tragic intensity which is given to one of the characters; I mean Shylock.

The character of Shylock is one of Shakespeare's most perfect creations, even though he devotes comparatively little space to its elucidation. The conception of this figure is as grand as the perfection of art with which it appears upon the scene. The very first words he speaks are characteristic, and still more the manner in which he speaks them; and at each one of his utterances we seem to see the man before us, and we

ourselves supply the gestures, the play of expression, which accompany his speech. As in his Richard III., Shakespeare has here furnished the actor with a worthy and most grateful task.

The two characters resemble each other in that one great passion dominates each with demoniac power. In Shylock it is the love of possession, the love of gold. His surrender to this passion has by degrees turned his heart to stone. Not always had he been so lacking in love; the tender memory of his dead wife, of the time of their betrothal, which once rises up before him, recalls a gleam of that radiant epoch: "It was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor; I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys." Whatever tenderness, reverence, he still feels is essentially for things of the past; it is of a historic, traditional character. Outward and purely traditional are his relations to his daughter; he understood her so little, con-

cerned himself so little about her inner life, so little endeavoured to influence her morally—she suffers so much from his hard, unfeeling nature, can so little respect him, that the paternal house seems a veritable hell to her, that, yielding to her love for Lorenzo, she flees from her father as from a jailer, and no stirrings of filial piety cause her to waver in her action.

Her flight is a terrible blow to Shylock; his paternal authority, the honour of his house, are deeply wounded; but what pains him most is the loss of his jewels and of his ducats.

A heartless father, a merciless usurer, Shylock, nevertheless, in his way, clings to religion. He contents himself with the strict observance of the letter of the law, arms himself in conscious self-righteousness, and beholds in his growing wealth the blessing of God:

"And thrift is blessing if men steal it not."

If his heart be dead to love, so much

the more is hatred familiar to him. He hates all Christians, but above all Antonio, whose high-minded, humane sentiments are directly opposed to his own nature, and who injures his trade:

"I hate him for he is a Christian,
But more for that in low simplicity
He lends out money gratis, and brings down
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.
If I can catch him once upon the hip,
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him."

How has Shakespeare been able to make this man appeal to us, to arouse our sympathies in his fate? Before all, because he makes Shylock's nature comprehensible to us, because he lets us see his inmost being, prompts us to put ourselves in his place. Shylock is a Jew; he belongs to the chosen race, which bears marks of the curse of a bondage of many centuries, which has been persecuted, robbed, tortured, and is still insulted and, upon occasion, trodden underfoot. The historical light in which the poet places

his figure elevates it and renders it at the same time humanly comprehensible. "He hates our sacred nation," Shylock says of Antonio, and although this motive is but one of many, and not the strongest, yet all the other motives that determine his action, taken in connection with this one, seem to assume a certain justification. When Shylock says: "Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that"—when Shylock speaks thus, he comes close to us humanly, we feel for him and with him.

It is above all on account of this feeling that the celebrated trial scene in the fourth act strikes us as harshly discordant. If Shylock is prevented from carrying out his bloody intentions in regard to Antonio, even if he is remorselessly punished, mortally wounded in what he holds most dear, it is nothing more than poetic justice. It is only against his being forced to become a convert that our feelings justly rebel. The contemporaries of the poet doubtless attached no such importance to this point. But it is not merely poetic justice that our feelings demand. Shylock has come too close to us, we have learned to know too intimately the grounds of his hatred, of the intensity of his resentment, his figure has become too humanly significant, and the misfortune which overtakes him appeals too deeply to our sympathies, to permit us to be reconciled to the idea that his fate, which moves us so tragically, should be con-

ceived otherwise than as a tragedy. We are powerfully moved when this man who stands upon his right, who stakes all to gain it, who hour by hour is strengthened in the belief that his right will be granted him—when this man suddenly feels the ground give way beneath his feet, when, in the name and with the forms of law, he is cheated of his right. And we cannot dismiss the thought that this decision, brought about by a lucky accident, by the sophistical interpretation of a document, is not commensurate to Shylock's grand passion. We crave to feel the necessity of the fate which befalls him, the inevitableness of his ruin. Not only the higher moral motives of his judges, but also the legal motives of the sentence as such, we wish to feel to be justified and necessary.

There is a discordance here which cannot be explained away. It was impossible for Shakespeare to avoid it. The most essential feature of the tale—the suit about the pound of flesh—the real

purpose, the gist of the whole, he could not and would not discard. It embraces, indeed, a symbolically profound thought: *Summum jus, summa injuria;* it is admirably adapted to satisfy upon Shylock, in the most pronounced form, the demands of poetic justice. Considered in the abstract, this feature satisfies our understanding, creates the pleasing impression which the spirited solution of a difficult problem is wont to produce. And in comedy we must often resort to abstraction in order to find unalloyed enjoyment. When we see the success of the plans in which the poet has specially aroused our interest, the favourable change of fortune of the persons who chiefly enlist our sympathies, we often dare not too vividly realize the moral relations and the human individuality of those who, in the happy consummation, are deeply wounded and hurt. Few comedies would be enjoyable without abstraction of this kind. But Shakespeare renders

this abstraction so difficult for us because he himself was incapable of it, because all his characters are drawn with equal sympathy and with equal objectiveness; there is, consequently, often something unsatisfying in the *dénouement* of his comedies. The offence generally consists in this: that for the sake of a happy solution the evil which appears too prominent in some of his personages is not wholly eradicated, the guilt not adequately atoned. In "The Merchant of Venice" we have an instance of the opposite: a comic solution and a tragic character; a tragic fate developed in a manner befitting comedy.

This capacity for abstraction, coupled with unlimited powers of observation, would have made Shakespeare's life intolerable had not the gods bestowed upon him as their choicest gift his fund of humour. It is humour which renders the inconsistencies of the world and of human nature endurable, as we make

them subjects of æsthetic apprehension—an apprehension which awakens within us a feeling of the ludicrous which is mingled with sadness. While wit consists in combining ideas that are discordant to each other in an unexpected manner, humour illumines for our inner vision the inconsistencies existing in things themselves, in our own being and action. To render humour effective a reference to one's own self is as important as it is in tragedy. It is only when we put ourselves in the position of the suffering hero, when we behold in his fate but a particular instance of a common destiny, that our soul is stirred with tragic sympathy. And it is only when we recognize in a humourous character the underlying traits of human nature and of our own that it will produce an effect in accordance with the poet's purpose.

Humour as a poetic faculty presupposes, before all else, a spiritual emancipation from self. Shakespeare must have be-

come objective to himself, have at once wept and laughed at the contradictions in his own nature, before he could have written "Love's Labour's Lost," the earliest of his works in which humour breaks out triumphantly. And from that time forward we see this child of the gods ever more vigorously stirring his wings, and the creatures of the poet ever more gaily fluttering about. Shakespearean comedy is inspired with humour; it permeates the language, animates the characters, shapes the situations, and to the hero of his tragedy it blows a breath of relief in the midst of the intensest strain and suspense.

If one would realize by an example the depth and daring of Shakespearean humour, let him think of that scene in "Henry IV." which, as Goethe has remarked, may well draw from us a lofty smile—the scene where Henry Percy, Hotspur, the noble hero, full of achievement, and Falstaff, that magnificent rogue and good-for-nothing, are lying on

the ground side by side; the one killed by Prince Henry's hand, the other, from cowardice, feigning death, to rise again when all have disappeared; or recall the love scenes in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" between Titania, the queen of the fairies, and the weaver Bottom, who, through a spell, but quite symbolically, bears an ass's head—that scene in which Shakespeare shows us the point where the divine and the human, the ideal and the coarsest reality, meet, where the spirit is dragged down by the dust.

> "Bis der Gott, des Irdischen entkleidet,
> Flammend sich vom Menschen scheidet."

Or, finally, see how the lightning flashes of humour accompany the thunder of Shakespeare's wrath in Isabella's words in "Measure for Measure"—those words which warn earthly greatness of its bounds, and which, at the same time, tell us why, in the loftiest view, though all things human seem so small, nothing appears ridiculous.

FIFTH LECTURE

SHAKESPEARE AS TRAGIC WRITER

SHAKESPEARE AS TRAGIC WRITER.

WE have sought in these lectures to approach our subject from various sides, and endeavoured to reach in these various paths a standpoint which might afford us the most complete view possible of the part of the subject under examination. To-day we have the difficult task of attempting to gain an insight into the most important, the most significant, but also the most unapproachable, side of our subject. Shakespeare, considered as a tragic writer, shall occupy our attention in our last lecture.

If Shakespeare as a comic poet must submit to being compared with Molière and to be measured by his standard, as a tragic writer he towers so far above any standard which may be adduced from modern poets that comparison becomes

impossible. From the lonely summit where he sits enthroned he beholds all other heights of tragic art far beneath at his feet, and he soars before the disciples of this art, in our time, as an unattainable model, as some being of a higher sphere.

What he is capable of as a poet, as a dramatist, Shakespeare reveals nowhere in so overpowering a manner as in his great tragedies; and as to what constitutes tragic action no poet of ancient times can instruct us better, no modern poet as well.

With the peculiar nature of this action, and the means by which it is produced, theory since Aristotle has repeatedly occupied itself; and it has, at various times, owing partly to a mistaken or a one-sided interpretation of the ancient philosopher, partly to a confounding of morals and æsthetics, advanced the most absurd views.

You will not expect a criticism of these

views at this point, nor, indeed, to hear from me any elaborate theoretic disquisition. Permit me, nevertheless, to make a few leading remarks of a general character before turning to my real subject, Shakespeare.

The conflict which, as we have seen in a former lecture, constitutes the essence of every real drama is in tragedy of such a nature that the hero succumbs, and our sympathies are enlisted in his sufferings and his ruin. We are profoundly moved by compassion and, at the same time, by fear, produced by beholding in the unfortunate hero an image of ourselves, by seeing in his fate the common fate of man and our own, by being reminded of the limits which confine humanity. Tragic fear will always be naturally awakened where tragic compassion is aroused; and the presence or absence of such fear may serve as a gauge to determine whether our compassion has really reached a tragic height, or whether we feel merely a greater or lesser

degree of sympathy, a pleasing agitation, but not of that nature which stirs the soul to its inmost depth. Everything, then, depends upon exciting tragic compassion. How is this aroused? The greatness of the suffering which we witness is not in itself sufficient. A great misfortune, terrible suffering, may inspire horror, revulsion, disgust; if it concern a person whom we love, it will, under any circumstances, cause us pain. But in order to excite our compassion, it is essential that we should perceive a connection between the hero's sorrows and his actions, and that we should so comprehend his actions as related to his character and his position that we may imagine ourselves in his place.

The deed or deeds of the hero of tragedy which are the cause of his sufferings constitute his tragic error, or, as they are pleased to term it in more modern times, his tragic fault. The expression would in itself not be objectionable if one always

realized what sort of fault is here meant, namely, simply the origin of suffering. But if one means by a tragic fault a morally reprehensible action, for which the perpetrator justly suffers, and for which he must atone by his sorrows, he displaces the proper standpoint to such a degree that it is impossible for him to realize, in the great tragic writers, the simple workings of facts upon each other. Even Sophocles' Antigone, that ideal of lofty maidenhood, of purest sisterly affection, of willing sacrifice to duty, is the author of her tragic fate. But without that unfortunate confusion of ideas would it have entered the mind of any philologist or æsthetic critic to suggest, by way of correction, to Antigone that she erred in acting against the authority of the state? as if she could have done aught but fulfil the higher law at the expense of the lower; or to maintain that she erred at least in expressing herself in such unmeasured terms to the

representative of the state, in disregarding the reverence due him? as if, according to the Hellenic conception, it did not well become one whose kindred are insulted to be roused to a noble rage, and as if this error, even if according to Greek ethics it were one, involved a fault in any way proportionate to Antigone's fate. Such is the peculiar character of that false conception of the tragic fault, exposing it at once to a *reductio ad absurdum*, that it sometimes forces us to attribute to a microscopic cause an effect as great as that from an infinitely great cause.

The weight of the tragic fault does not necessarily depend upon the magnitude of the moral transgression connected with it. Whether the acts from which the tragic misfortunes spring are in themselves good or bad in a moral sense is not the essential point, though the work of the tragic poet will doubtless assume very different forms in the two cases.

The essential thing primarily is that these acts should evoke a violent conflict between the hero and a power whose significance we must acknowledge, and that we should feel that this conflict is inevitable. That it is the power of the state with which Antigone enters into conflict impresses upon her fate the stamp of necessity, and consequently of tragedy, in a heightened degree, but her tragic error does not by any means constitute on that account a moral fault.

But if we picture to ourselves a hero who is drawn into a conflict not only with the outward, official representatives of the moral order of the universe, but who is driven to deeds of violence by an overpowering desire, then the task of the poet appears, on the one hand, easier, on the other, so much the more difficult. The motive of the tragic suffering is simplified, since our feelings, anticipating the dramatic unfolding, here imperiously demand this suffering; but, again, it is

harder for the poet to excite compassion, as the sight of what one feels is a just punishment will not in itself admit the awakening of compassion. The mistake of those who convert the tragic error into a tragic fault is here most clearly shown; for the greater the moral delinquency of the hero the more difficult is it to produce tragic effects. It is here pre-eminently, too, that the art of the poet is put to the test in his conception of the motive of the tragic error, of the irreparable deed; it is in just such cases that Shakespeare reveals his incomparable tragic power. Far from painting his offending hero in the blackest possible colours, from representing him as repellent to the highest degree, he endeavours, on the contrary, to bring him humanly near to us, to make his deed comprehensible; endeavours, if I may say so, to transform his crime, as far as it be possible, into innocence, or, as Schiller expresses it:

"Er wälzt die gröss're Hälfte seiner Schuld
Den unglückseligen Gestirnen zu."*

But the means which Shakespeare employs to this end are of such masterly simplicity, are so thoroughly different from the painful artifices to which feeble-hearted tragedians of later times are wont to resort, that they have deceived many commentators as to his purpose; commentators only, however, never the unbiassed reader, and far less still the spectator, who feels the effects intended to be produced by the poet without troubling himself much about the manner in which they were aroused.

But here I expect to be met by the objection from the well-meaning that to make a wicked hero, a criminal of tragedy, an object of our sympathy has its doubtful side. I acknowledge this consideration to be perfectly well grounded. I am, still further, of the

* " He casts the greater half of his great guilt
Upon the unfav'ring and malignant stars."

conviction, founded upon experience and reflection, that an easily inflamed fancy, a highly developed tendency to imitation, has, under the influence of a tragic representation, not rarely carried away the spectator to the commission of a real tragic deed. Yet if we should banish a certain kind of tragedy, or, indeed, tragedy in general, from our land on account of its possibly evil results, should we not, as a logical consequence, eventually arrive at having to banish every species of art—nay, finally, even science? Art in itself pursues no practically useful aims, nor any moral ones: its sole end is to heighten and strengthen our sense of life [*Lebensgefühl*]. But he who considers the moral effect of art,—I mean real art,—impartially will probably arrive at the conviction that in the main, and on the whole, the beneficial effects outweigh the injurious ones, if not, perhaps, in number, yet in inner significance. And as regards Shakespeare in particular, and

those of his tragedies in which he enlists our sympathies for a guilty hero, is there a loftier human standpoint than one that comprehends all and forgives all? is it not more divine deeply to pity Othello or Macbeth for his deeds than to condemn him?

It is essential that we should not confound heterogeneous domains of life and various points of view. The tragic stage is not a court of justice, the poet not an advocate, and the spectator not a judge. But it is a significant fact that at the very time when a morbid humanitarianism invades the courts of justice, playing a game with the notion of responsibility and irresponsibility, which, carried to its natural consequences, would convert the sword of justice into a mere child's bugbear, the tragic critic so often feels it his vocation to formulate judgments of moral condemnation.

But it is my firm conviction that a thorough study of Shakespeare's trage-

dies would as greatly promote real humanity as it would antagonize that false humanity which would exempt the criminal from retribution at the expense and to the danger of society.

If Shakespeare is the greatest of tragic writers, it is pre-eminently because of his spiritual depth and his thorough reality. He needed no traditional æsthetic theory in order to penetrate the tragic idea. The function of the drama is, according to him, no other than to hold the mirror up to nature. And human nature, the life of man, offered him a wealth of tragic elements, of tragic destinies, which he observed, felt, and probed with that universal sympathy for which he was fitted by his own inmost experiences. Dramatic creation had become his vocation, but he did not make a profession of it; and as all art was held sacred by him, so, pre-eminently, was tragedy. He did not obtrude himself upon his tragic material, but rather it obtruded itself upon him.

His maiden effort alone, the bloody tragedy "Titus Andronicus," evidently owed its existence to no inner necessity, but to the desire of the rising dramatist to rival the brilliant example of Marlowe and of his imitators. The author of "Titus Andronicus" was not yet ripe for his material, nor, indeed, for tragedy at all; nevertheless, he had already an intuitive sense of how tragic passion is developed and finds expression, and if in dramatic composition and dramatic language he proves himself a docile disciple of Marlowe, in the art of creating tragic effects he shows himself from the first far superior to his predecessor.

Then Shakespeare turned, as we have seen before, to the domain of comedy, and not long before the close of that series of lovely, bright creations, in which love in its manifold variations is his theme, he produced, at a happy moment, "Romeo and Juliet," that tragedy of his youth which stands out in astonishing loftiness,

yet not without connection, not incomprehensibly, amid the comedies which surround it. And we see in "Romeo and Juliet" that, if it is given to genius to find the right matter at the right moment, he does not owe it to mere luck, but also to his own patience inasmuch as he knows how to wait for the right moment. Shakespeare did not undertake to dramatize the fable of "Romeo and Juliet" as soon as he became acquainted with it. We see that the matter had already vividly interested him when he wrote the "Two Gentlemen of Verona"; we find evidence of it in the character and in the name of the Julia of the comedy, in the analogy between Valentine's banishment from Milan and Romeo's from Verona; it is shown, above all, in the additional insignificant circumstance that the banished Valentine in Shakespeare, like Romeo in the original tale, sojourned in Mantua.

Not until many years after the comple-

tion of "Romeo and Juliet" was it that Shakespeare's reflections upon the nature of man and his destiny attained such depth and gravity that they compelled him, as it were, for a number of years, to tragic production. Like all great poets, but in a higher degree than most, he possessed that inborn fine sense of the fitness of things, of harmony, of justice. He needed not to seek laboriously for tragic effects, and he ran no risk of choosing the wrong means. It did not occur to him to excite in his hearers emotions which had not thrilled the depths of his own soul; it was impossible for him to disguise himself, to exaggerate. That effect of pity and of fear which at once harrows and relieves us, and which constitutes the essence of tragedy, he had himself often enough felt; he needed but to look into his own heart to see what means were required to produce it. But even this represents the matter too objectively. When matter like that of

"Hamlet," of "Othello," of "Lear," took possession of him, conquered for a time a supreme place in his inner world, a certain necessity constrained an adjustment, an assimilation, of this matter to the laws which governed that inner world. The transformation of the adventures, the character, the destiny, of the hero was accomplished with restless energy, yet in great part unconsciously, in consonance with those laws; and in the dramatic conception there arose in indissolubly close connection the tragic idea and the plan of the tragic action.

For Shakespeare it was a matter of course that tragic suffering cannot be a thing of accident, that it must be brought about by the sufferer's own deeds; for to him it was a matter of profound significance, not a mere cruel sport of chance. It was a matter of course that the tragic catastrophe presupposed the insolubleness of the preceding conflict. Tragic necessity was an axiom in the code of his

poetic logic—one upon which he may, perhaps, never have reflected, but which formed, nevertheless, the groundwork of all his reflections: necessary connection between the sufferings of the hero and the conflict into which his deeds throw him with the powers and the laws of the world about him; necessary connection between the actions of the hero and his inmost nature as it is shaped and developed by the circumstances of his contact with the outer world.

In his tragedies Shakespeare unconsciously followed the same fundamental laws which governed the great tragedians of classical antiquity. But these fundamental laws allow a wide latitude to the individuality of the poet, and the form, which is determined by the conditions of time and place. Many varieties, therefore, may be conceived in the domain of tragedy. Shakespearean tragedy bears, primarily, the family traits of his dramas, of the English drama in general of the

time; it has its broad, realistic basis, its abundance of reflection of real life.

A work of art can offer us but a segment of the world, of reality; but if all great poets have known how to round this fragment, and invest it with an ideal significance which shapes it into a perfect whole, into a sort of a microcosm, an image of the great world, we see Shakespeare, besides this, ceaselessly endeavouring to extend as far as possible the boundaries of his microcosm.

By means of a thousand little artifices which serve this purpose our fancy is transported to actions and scenes beyond those actually presented before us, to actions of the past, to scenes beyond the boards. I shall only remind you here of Capulet's feast in "Romeo and Juliet," of the brief scene between Capulet's servants which precedes the appearance of the guests, where the excitement and disorder prevailing on the stage give us a sense of the reality of the feast which is held behind

the scene; and, further, the short colloquy between Capulet and his nephew, the natural, everyday tone of which makes the present moment seem but a link in a long chain of years of their life; of the nurse's narrative of Juliet's childhood—and how many similar instances might be mentioned! Most distinctly of this nature is the art wherewith Shakespeare always so shapes the utterances of new personages on the scene, be it in monologue or dialogue, that we are transported in the most natural manner into the midst of the thing that occupies them. In the monologues the intention of the poet has sometimes been misunderstood; as, for instance, in Hamlet's famous "To be, or not to be," where even eminent players often disregard the fact that the opening words of the monologue do not form the beginning of Hamlet's soliloquy, but are the result of reflections directly preceding them whose substance, though suppressed, is necessarily in-

ferred from what is uttered. The effect produced by all these and similar artifices is that no doubt can spring up in our minds as to the reality of what we see and hear. If it is a question of the narration of an occurrence which we have either not ourselves seen, or the truth of which it is hard for us to believe in spite of having seen it, the poet never fails to give us a conviction of its reality by making the narrators introduce all sorts of insignificant details that they remember; often, too, by making the narrators deviate from each other in such minor details. Let us hear how Hamlet questions those who have informed him of the apparition of the ghost, questions them about the particulars:

Hamlet. Arm'd, say you?
Marcellus. / *Bernardo.* Arm'd, my lord.
Hamlet. From top to toe?
Marcellus. / *Bernardo.* My lord, from head to foot.
Hamlet. Then saw you not his face?

Horatio. O, yes, my lord; he wore his beaver up.
Hamlet. What, look'd he frowningly?
Horatio. A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.
Hamlet. Pale or red?
Horatio. Nay, very pale.
Hamlet. And fix'd his eyes upon you?
Horatio. Most constantly.
Hamlet. I would I had been there.
Horatio. It would have much amazed you.
Hamlet. Very like, very like. Stay'd it long?
Horatio. While one with moderate haste might tell a hundred.
Marcellus. } Longer, longer.
Bernardo. }
Horatio. Not when I saw't.
Hamlet. His beard was grizzled,—no?
Horatio. It was, as I have seen it in his life,
A sable silver'd.
Hamlet. I will watch to-night;
Perchance 'twill walk again.

Of still greater significance to the underlying character of Shakespearean tragedy than the instances cited was the custom of the stage of the time to extend the dramatic action itself beyond the limits customary with the ancients, and with other imitators of them. The latter, as a

rule, really represent only the crisis of the action; that which has preceded belongs among the presumptions which the spectator learns by means of narrative or reference; the English actually represented everything that bore any essential relation to the plot.

Matchless in this connection is the art with which Shakespeare contracts wide-spreading matter, condenses the dramatic action; the way in which by the simplest means,—by alternately introducing parallel motives and parallel scenes, by foreshadowing to us at the appropriate time what is to come,—he produces the illusion that we have really beheld in all the plenitude of life even those parts of the action which he has depicted merely with a few strokes. A few short scenes, outwardly separated by others, but in reality most closely connected, suffice to create an illusion of abundant and continuous action. And, withal, we completely lose our sense of the measure of time. In the study of

the reckoning of time in Shakespeare's works, to which recent English research seems particularly inclined to devote itself, it becomes evident that in many of his dramas, perhaps in a majority of them, a double reckoning of time prevails. This appears with especial clearness in "King Lear." If we follow the scenes in which the king appears, from the point where Goneril first shows her disregard toward him to the night when he wanders shelterless upon the heath, and calculate the time that has elapsed between these two periods, we shall find that it comprises but a limited number of hours—at most a few days. During this same time, however, Cordelia in France has received information of the base treatment her father has experienced, has found opportunity to communicate with Kent by letter, nay, more, French troops have already landed on the British coast. But what does it matter? What spectator that follows the fortunes of Lear with ever-in-

creasing sympathy will think of verifying the poet's reckoning of the time necessary for the development of those fortunes? Shakespeare well knew that time is reckoned only by thoughts and experiences.

The wealth of substance offered us in "Lear" comports well with the idea that much might be happening in other places at the same time.

No poet ever better understood than Shakespeare how to utilize for the highest purposes of his art the constitution of the stage which was at his disposal, and the dramatic tradition to which he attached himself. The ideality of space which characterized the English stage of that time, and of which the ideality of time is a necessary corollary, the ability of the prevailing drama to include a long chain of events throughout its entire course, permitted Shakespeare in tragedy to follow his inner bent, which impelled him to the psychological side of his subject. It permitted him to represent, as he loved to

do, the evolution of a passion from its first beginnings to its climax; and not seldom reaching still farther back, to show us the soil in which it was to take root. It permitted him to show us a character unfolding before our eyes under the reciprocal influence of deed and experience, of action and environment. It enabled him thus in his tragedies to lay the chief weight upon the connection between the character and the acts of the tragic hero, or, what is the same thing, to devote the best part of his powers and endeavours to the dramatic unfolding of his characters.

If we study Shakespeare's tragedies as far as "King Lear" in their chronological order, we see how the poet grows ever more clearly conscious of his real vocation, of his real strength; how, ever more decidedly, he makes the tragic conflict centre in the soul of his hero.

With "Romeo and Juliet"* we have already occupied ourselves in a former

lecture. In the extremely simple conflict of this tragedy the antagonistic powers of the outside world and those that determine the action of the main characters play an equal part, and the tragic theme did not in itself demand a special display of character study, much as Shakespeare accomplished even here in the way of psychological subtility.

In "Julius Cæsar" our interest centres in the ideal figure of Brutus, the embodiment of manly loftiness of thought, of manly honour, full of the sense of duty, full of moderation and self-control, full of self-denial—Brutus, who lacks nothing but practical insight into the men and things of this world.

And the tragedy of his fate lies in this: that precisely in consequence of his high sentiments he falls under the influence of men cleverer, more keen-sighted, but morally far inferior; that precisely in consequence of his feeling of duty he is plunged into the most agonizing conflict

of duties, and, apparently through self-denial, comes to a fatal decision; that from his sense of virtue he aims at an unattainable end, and in the pursuance of this end uses means repellent to his nature and which cover him with reproach, while, at the same time, they fail of their purpose. It is a painful spectacle to see this noble stoic share the vulgar error of all conspirators. How thrilling do the words "*Et tu, Brute!*" sound coming from Cæsar's lips! Brutus become the murderer of his benefactor! And most depressing is the ever clearer consciousness that the crime was committed in vain. Brutus' life becomes a chain of disappointments. In place of Cæsar his country has now civil war and a new triumvirate, the source of new civil wars and of new tyranny. Ever more hopeless grows the struggle of the idealist with harsh reality. To his grief over the consequences of his deed, the failure of his plans, the downfall of the

republic, are added sorrows of another kind: he loses his Portia. But the stoic stifles his grief, masters his feelings, continues to do to the end what he deems his duty. And finally, when all is over, he rejoices in the thought that he has never in the whole course of his life met any who have proved unfaithful to him, and he falls upon his sword exclaiming:

> "Cæsar, now be still:
> I kill'd not thee with half so good a will."

But though Brutus is the chief character in the tragedy, it bears its title "Julius Cæsar" not in vain. Mightier than all the personages of the drama does the idea prove that was projected into the world by Cæsar and represented by him. In vain do Brutus and his friends combat against it; they are annihilated in the struggle. And the less adequate its embodiment, the more distinctly does the full significance of the idea as such stand out. Or, to be more explicit, it is

embodied not so much in Cæsar's person as in his position, his power, in the judgment, the mood, the character, of the people. Hence the significance in this tragedy of the gatherings of the populace, scenes which are at once eminently characteristic and intensely dramatic. If Shakespeare be guilty of serious errors as to the outward usages, nay, in individual instances as to the views, the manners, of the Romans, that which is really typical of the time and situation he reproduces with historic fidelity.

In Hamlet also Shakespeare gives us an idealist, one who is placed amid surroundings incongruous with his nature, who sees himself confronted with a problem to which he is not equal and which proves his ruin. Here, too, it is a question of regicide. Brutus murders Cæsar, who has been like a father to him. Hamlet has the death of his father to avenge. Both feel themselves called upon to set right the time which is out of joint. But

Brutus thinks it possible to solve his insoluble problem. Hamlet feels that he is unequal to the task forced upon him and which he must recognize as a duty. Brutus errs in his assumption, as he does in his choice of means. Hamlet's vision is theoretically far clearer, but as he cannot gather himself up to make a decision, he does not even reach the point of framing a plan. Both are endowed with profoundly moral natures, spirits delicately attuned. Brutus has the self-control and the energy which Hamlet lacks; Hamlet, the deeper insight into the relations of things and into his own conscience which Brutus does not possess.

In "Julius Cæsar" we have, besides the general human interest, the powerful historical interest attaching to the time. In "Hamlet" the problem is treated in its most universal significance, and presented with a depth which will remain unfathomed for all time. What experiences of Shakespeare's past and present formed the basis

of the mood which gave birth to Hamlet, what elements impelled him to descend deeper than he had ever done before into the abysses of his own soul, will perhaps forever remain a mystery.

And a mystery, to a certain extent, will the character of Hamlet also, and the real intention of the poet, remain. Though Goethe, in his "Wilhelm Meister," has given us the key to the solution, it seems as if we had not since then penetrated much farther into the heart of the sanctuary. It is, of course, not my intention to hastily swell the list of the already innumerable Hamlet commentaries whose strength lies wholly in criticism, their weakness in positive construction. This much, however, I shall permit myself to express as my firm conviction: that Goethe's statement of the main problem, much as it may leave in the dark, yet rightly defines the limits within which the gist of it lies. When Goethe, referring to Hamlet and his task, says that the impos-

sible is demanded of him,—not the impossible in itself, but that which is impossible to him,—he traces, as precisely as may be, the delicate line which investigation should follow, and from which it is apt to deviate. As regards later interpretations, like that of Werder, who finds the essential feature of the tragic conflict in the objective difficulties which confront Hamlet, and believes the point to be that Claudius, the murderer and usurper, is to be punished, while, at the same time, the world is given sufficient legal proof, proof beyond all justifiable question, of his guilt—as regards this and similar interpretations, I shall simply remark that Shakespeare evidently had no such thought in his mind, for he obstinately disdains to use the occasions which offer themselves to express such an intention. At no point does he show us Hamlet occupied with a real examination of his task, with a discussion of its actual nature and extent, of the means at his command

to accomplish it, of the difficulties inherent in the undertaking. Now I firmly maintain under all circumstances the principle that it is not the proper method to drag to the light, nay, more, to submit to a microscopic analysis and to take as a starting point of investigation, things that Shakespeare intentionally or unintentionally leaves in the dark. That which he considers of moment Shakespeare expresses clearly enough; what he leaves unexpressed cannot have been deemed essential by him, and should, therefore, not be so regarded by us.

The essence of the Hamlet problem must, then, lie in the character of the hero as it was shaped by the portentous events which precede the dramatic action, and as it is further developed before our eyes by the problem which confronts him. But this character, although transparent, is so profound that no one has ever yet fathomed its depths.

Hamlet remains a mystery, but it is

irresistibly attractive in that we feel that it is not an artificially created mystery, but one founded upon the nature of things. We recognize the inherent reality of this character, even though we despair of ever exhaustively interpreting it. And, above all, we feel the universal validity, the typicalness, of Hamlet. As he thought and felt, or in some like manner, have we all at some time thought and felt and acted, or rather failed to act. An inward conflict of the most universal significance is here depicted with unsurpassed veracity and with a realistic abundance of detail. It is this which gives "Hamlet" a pre-eminent charm among Shakespeare's great tragedies. "Othello," "Macbeth," "Lear," are not less profound, not less grandly conceived, not less dramatic; nay, they are, in these respects, in part, superior to "Hamlet." But a psychological delineation carried out in such detail, such a wealth of traits taken from nature's self, of traits which compel us to

descend into the depths of our own hearts, we find in "Hamlet" alone. The highest realism, nay, naturalism, here attains highest poetic effect; but it is the realism of a Shakespeare applied to the most ideal of subjects, to that Hamlet whom he endowed with a greater abundance of the treasures hidden in the depths of his own soul than fell to the lot of any hero before or after him.

"Othello" is one of the tragedies in which the hero plays a more passive rôle during the first half of the drama, until the climax is reached; nor could it be otherwise in a tragedy of jealousy. But all the more decidedly is it his own action—the abduction of Desdemona—which prepares the ground where his jealousy may take root; all the more decidedly his own action which causes the tragic catastrophe; and that which compels him to this last deed is the overmastering power of a ruling passion, and that the most terrible of passions, which

rends his soul with a maddening tyranny. And let us not overlook the fact that the central point of the dramatic conflict lies here absolutely in the character of the hero. Outward influence is limited to Iago's plot, conceived, to be sure, with demoniac cunning: a little more knowledge of human nature, a little more keen-sightedness, a little *sang-froid,* and Othello would have torn asunder the net which was tightening about him. Let us observe, too, that Shakespeare often, and most in his most powerful tragedies, shows us the tragic passion which springs of necessity from the hero's nature to be in direct opposition to that nature. Othello's jealousy, his unfounded suspicion, cannot be explained simply on the ground of a certain spiritual narrowness; but essentially on the ground of his being of an open, high-minded, confiding nature. Not knowing what it is to dissimulate, he does not believe in Iago's dissimulation. And it is just because the

passion aroused within him is contrary to his nature that it exerts so fearful and destructive an influence upon him.

We observe the same thing in "Macbeth." In this play Shakespeare propounded to himself one of the most difficult problems that any tragic poet has ever had to deal with. Until then his tragic heroes had been such that they could all say of themselves, as Lear does later:

"I am a man more sinn'd against than sinning."

To Macbeth, the regicide, the usurper, the bloody tyrant, this cannot be applied. How could Shakespeare dare to make a figure like Macbeth the hero of a tragedy? How has he succeeded in arousing for this hero the sympathies, enlisting for him the deep feelings, of the beholder? Admirable is the lofty way in which he disdains all outward help, all petty artifices, and leads the problem back to its simplest, most difficult, pro-

foundest form, and solves it in all its profundity. He suppresses every feature furnished by his source which could palliate or excuse Macbeth's deed, that fatal deed, the murder of Duncan, from which all the others flow. And this he does not merely tacitly by his manner of presenting the personages of the action and their relation to each other. No; in distinct words does he tell us that Duncan was the gentlest, the most just, of princes, who has heaped honours upon Macbeth, and, in token of his favour, visits him in his castle and there sleeps confidingly under his roof; he tells us expressly that everything seems to deter Macbeth from his deed, that nothing impels him to it but his ambition alone. And he tells us this by the mouth of Macbeth himself. It is Macbeth who is his own accuser; he presents the tragic problem to us in all its fearful clearness; and this it is that at once gives us the solution. For in the fact that Macbeth accuses himself before

he does the deed, that he does nothing to palliate the crime in his own eyes, that he is filled with agony and dread as he clutches his dagger and makes his way to Duncan's chamber, we see that he is not a cold-blooded murderer, but the victim of an overpowering passion which takes complete possession of his vivid imagination, summons up before him dismal pictures more fearful than reality, holds him under a spell from which he seeks to free himself by his deed. And this passion, ambition, springing from the justifiable self-esteem of this heroic nature, yes, this truly royal nature—had Macbeth been born in the purple—fanned by the prophecy of the witches, nourished by the influence of his wife, develops itself to a degree and exhibits itself in a way directly opposed to his heroic nature and destructive of its very essence.

Grand and moving is the simplicity with which Shakespeare has endowed his hero as it manifests itself in the words

which Macbeth speaks after Banquo's apparition:

"Blood hath been shed ere now, i' th' olden time,
Ere humane statute purged the gentle weal;
Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd
Too terrible for th' ear: the time has been,
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end; but now they rise again,
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools: this is more strange
Than such a murder is."

In "King Lear" Shakespeare presents to us a strange mixture of strength and weakness, of heroism and childlike helplessness, of manly passion and childish wilfulness, in the figure of that royal old man who, too late, is compelled to go through the hard school of life, too late sees his illusions destroyed by rude reality, and is thus driven into madness. Nothing can be more tragic than the fate of this king, who, so accustomed to unbounded obedience that opposition puts him beside himself, nevertheless renounces

his power, divides his realm among his children,—and such children!—and thinks, withal, that he can maintain his consequence undiminished to his death; nothing more tragic than this man to whom love is such an infinite necessity and who yet has never known genuine love; who only learns to know it when, enraged by his wounded self-love, he has cast a being indispensable to him, his Cordelia, from him, and experiences in his other children what filial ingratitude, unnatural selfishness, mean; who first begins to recognize the world in its true shape, in all its baseness, at a moment when darkness is beginning to gather over his own spirit. And thus Lear, with whose soul Nature with her varying moods seems in league, wanders forth through the night—a physical, spiritual, moral night, illumined only by fearful lightning flashes—until he finds the light once more in the arms of his Cordelia. But only for a short space does this newly regained happiness endure;

the light is again extinguished, a horrible fatality snatches his daughter from him, and, in the infinite despair of an unavailing grief, Lear himself yields up his breath. And as a parallel to Lear Shakespeare gives us Gloucester, who has sinned in blind passion, and for whom the just gods have created of the fruit of his sin an instrument to scourge him with; who allows himself to be ensnared by the devilish cunning of his bastard son, Edmund, and thrusts his legitimate son, the noble Edgar, from him; who, like Lear, recognizes his injustice only when it is too late; who, in consequence of Edmund's treachery, is robbed of his sight, and now feels his spirit, too, sinking into darkness, and, despairing of divine justice, wants to put an end to his life, but, under the wise and gentle guidance of his repudiated son, learns the duty of sufferance, of humble submission to a higher power, and regains his faith in the gods and in humanity.

"King Lear" is, taken as a whole, the mightiest work that Shakespeare produced. It is not only the most tragic among his tragedies, but, at the same time, the one in which his power of construction, his skill in dramatic condensation, achieve their greatest triumphs. In no other of his works do we find crowded together such a wealth of important characters and events. And how has the poet succeeded in interweaving all his motives, and in forming inwardly and outwardly a consistent unit out of all this abundance! And how from beginning to end is the execution maintained at the high level of the conception! How does the language of the poet rise to every situation, every mood!

There is nothing which has the power to thrill us to the innermost fibres of our being like that scene where the aged king, falling into madness, exposed to the fury of the elements upon the waste heath, bids these elements defiance, and

conjures them to wreak their vengeance upon a thankless, sinful humanity which his curse would destroy in the germ. I say there is nothing as thrilling as this scene, unless it be that other scene where the tragic suspense, having reached its utmost bounds, resolves itself in tears when Lear and Cordelia meet again.

"Lear" is also among all Shakespeare's tragedies the most profound. In no other work does the poet present the great world-mystery in such lofty symbols, with such remorseless truth. The world into which he introduces us is impelled by wild passion, rude pleasures, coldly calculating egoism. In the fate of its inhabitants is seen clearly the hand of Nemesis: the wicked fall victims to their own crimes; but is there not also revealed the rule of a benign Providence in the fortunes of Lear, and, above all, in the lot of Cordelia? Or do we, perhaps, rather receive the impression to

which Gloucester lends words when he says:

> "As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods—
> They kill us for their sport."

The poet does not deny a Providence,—he believes in a divine government of the world,—but he is content to worship in humility the mystery in which it enshrouds itself. He paints the world as he sees it, and it appears dark to him; but it is at night that the stars become visible.

"Nothing almost sees miracles but misery," says Kent; but the miracle consists in this: that in misery human fortitude is best developed, that virtue, like a lovely lily, springs forth out of the common slough of depravity. Gloucester only learns to know in his wretchedness the true worth of man and of life, and Lear then first experiences what love means. The optimism which the poet does not renounce even in "Lear" is of a

purely ethical nature; he appeals to our conscience. In loud tones he preaches the duty of resigned endurance, of manly steadfastness, of strenuous moral conduct; he makes us feel how the Good, totally regardless of any outward success, is in itself a thing most real, to be striven for above all other things. He strengthens our faith in virtue and incites us to it in figures like that of Kent, and, above all, in the gracious and lofty figure of Cordelia; he animates us with hope in the eventual triumph of the good in this world in the fortunes of Edgar.

The picture of the world which Shakespeare presents to us is illuminated in one way in his tragedy, and in another in his comedy; the deeply religious spirit of the artist is apparent in both—a religiousness whose root and essence lie in his moral sense, and which, therefore, does not need to shut its eyes to unpleasant facts. Shakespeare loves life and is penetrated with a sense of its high worth, but yet,

like Schiller, he is convinced that life is not the highest good, and he knows that no one can be pronounced happy before his death. To him the best thing on earth is love—self-sacrificing, active; and he feels that it is infinite love which pervades and animates the universe.

With these earnest reflections, according with the earnestness of the time through which we are passing, let me conclude this series of lectures to which you have had the goodness to listen with such patience and such gratifying interest. I should consider myself happy did I dare to say that I had succeeded in bringing the great poet of whom I have been speaking somewhat closer to your understandings, and, above all, to your hearts.

THE END.

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